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STORIES



THESE BONES FOR HIRE by Mark Guthrie
A Thrilling Story of Tomorrow's Frontiers

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to quote:

MARK GUTHRIE

I sold "These Bones For Hire" to Howard Browne several months ago, but I know I won't get over that "happy feeling" for quite some time—right up to when it appears. Because I read *Amazing* for so many years without dreaming I'd ever appear in its pages, that—well, it just goes to show. Anybody can do it. Or can they? That was my first reaction, but after a first sale, a writer tends to forget the hours of drudgery; the flood of rejects that come kiting back through the mail. The periodic feeling that you should be digging a ditch instead of trying to write because editors seldom reject a well-dug ditch.

"Bones—" is my first sale and I don't know whether I'll ever get another one or not. But if writing success springs from many and varied previous occupations, I should qualify. Began by selling papers in Chicago when I was seven. Branched into books, vacuum cleaners, and real estate as the years went by. Won a gas station in a poker game from a man in a suburb of Kansas City and thought I was very lucky. Not so. Investigation showed he only rented the pumps and all I'd taken over was his bills. I took over the lease, however, and ran it for three



years after which I passed it on to another lucky fellow over a crap table and went off to a big affair known as World War II. Came out with a game leg and a pension therefrom which—put with what I had—paid for a car and trailer for myself and the cute little wife I acquired a month after coming back from Europe.

We traveled about earning a living by repairing typewriters and cash registers from here to there. Acquired a portable in lieu of payment for repairing same. I began pecking at it and short stories came out. Not good ones, though. More pecking and finally "Bones—" and a sale and money and everything.

Is this an easy racket? I don't know, but I'm going to find out.

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the observatory

by The Editor



● We see by several fanzines and an editorial in one of the promags that an anthology editor and a writer of science-fiction are having their troubles. This, of course, hardly comes under the heading of news; editors and authors are in hot water about as often as your dinner dishes.

But the two men we're talking about have run into a spot of grief which, it seems to us, deserves more than casual attention from readers of s-f. One is a large, reasonably sensible and certainly competent young man named Sam Moskowitz, known to fandom as the ex-editor of the now defunct Science-Fiction Plus and as one of the more dedicated and articulate of s-f missionaries. Seems that Mr. Moskowitz was asked by a publisher to put together a s-f anthology, each story in which was to be selected by a promag editor as his favorite from his own back issues.

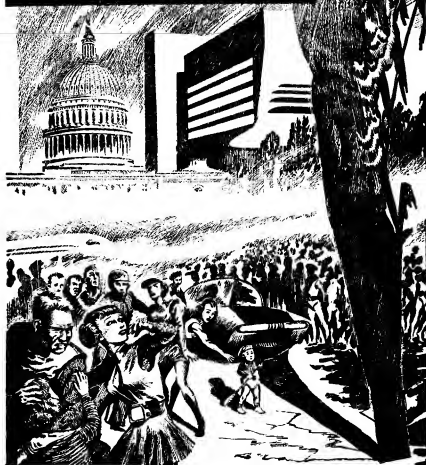
What Sam should have known, we'd say, is that he was bound to run into difficulty from the very first. Either he must put aside his own opinions as to what constitutes a story exceptional enough to grace a hard-cover collection (thereby putting his approval on fiction he might not think much of himself), or he would have to go to bat for material *he* thought was the proper choice. Either way, somebody was going to get hurt—and that, it appears, is exactly what happened.

According to some editors, their choices were overruled; and when they refused to go along with Sam's alternate recommendations, they found themselves left out of the book altogether. This was the affront unforgivable—and rocks began to fly. Mr. Moskowitz screamed "foul" and hurried to give *his*

(Concluded on page 57)

THESE BONES FOR HIRE

by Mark Guthrie





The spectators gasped in horror as bodies cascaded to the street.

THESE BONES FOR HIRE

They were slaves: doomed to die in ore pits far from Earth. They could not rise in revolt; for violence was a sin. And then one man decided to rewrite a proverb: The wages of sin—is life!

I LAY on the jagged rocks trying not to breathe, listening to the heavy boots of the guards as they brought the dead bodies and threw them down on top of me. They were piled higher and higher and for this I was glad because I knew I was safe when hidden under the dead chems. Safe at least until the ship came to gather them up and dump them out in space.

The decision to do what I'd done, had been born in an instant. One minute I was working in the mine, swinging my pick and looking forward only to death—yearning for it. The work session was about over and there were three dead ones in our shaft. There were always some dead ones and at the end of each shift, the guards came along to pick them up and take them to the bonepile. And in that moment when I first heard the sound of the approaching guards, the idea came to me and I

acted upon it instantly. I dropped to the ground and lay motionless. I was not sure whether I would get away with it or not. Sometimes the guards checked for any sign of remaining life, but more often they didn't because ability to work was the deciding factor in Critchfield's asteroid mines and so the guards were not averse to hauling away those who had only a spark of life left.

This time, they did not check. I loosened my muscles and felt them lift me. I was carried, arms and heels with my hips banging the ground, to the scooter and thrown inside. As I fell, my head hit a protruding ridge and I was knocked out. This may have been my salvation because unconsciousness gave me a deathlike look and the guards were fooled. I came to as the truck stopped near the boneyard and here I was at the

bottom of the pile. Breathing a prayer of thanksgiving.

After I was sure they had left, I burrowed my way out from under the dead and got to my feet with a feeling of tremendous happiness. I guess that sort of thing is all a matter of comparison. Can you visualize yourself being joyful merely because you were able to crawl out from under a pile of dead companions and breathe again? joyful at not having evaded death, but at merely delaying it? Probably not, because, to experience such exhilaration from so little, you must first have less. In my case, I had to be brought across half a universe under the treachery of a simulated kindness and fair play. I had to look forward to a bright new future, then have it snatched from me, with slavery, cruelty, and calculated brutality put in its place. After being subjected to things like that, my moment of dubious freedom there by the dead—the murdered—was heaven itself.

After the first heavy reaction had passed, I walked to a rock and sat down and took stock of my situation. It was, in reality, little better than it had been before. Worse in one respect. If my treachery were

discovered, I would be put to death by torture as an example to the rest. Critchfield's foreman did not object to our dying, but they very much resented our escaping with a few hours of work left in our bodies.

So what did I have? I was a fugitive on a relatively small asteroid without food or shelter. In the end I could look forward only to being trapped and killed. But even so, that moment of freedom was worth it. Such is the human spirit.

Did I say human? Such a breach of decency was dangerous. The chem who implied human characteristic on Critchfield's asteroids—or even on Terra for that matter—was taking his life in his hands.

I sat there, feeling the cold wind on my face, savoring the chill of freedom and wondering how long it would last. Then came the resolution to make it last as long as possible and to make my taking dear indeed to the guards. It would be a pleasure to kill as many as possible before they stopped me.

As I thought along these lines, even more daring thoughts came into my mind. Why not go down gloriously in the first attempted escape

that had ever taken place here? A wonderful way to die! With this thought in mind, I began to weigh the situation.

Allies! That was the first thought. Who would they be? This was not hard to decide. There was Victor, Marko, Jamie, Hans, and—and yes, Willie. Willie's strength would come in handy. Come in handy for what? I laughed and there must have been a touch of insanity in the sound. Handy for what—when I did not even know how I could release them and what good could come of a release even if achieved.

But, warm with the joy of this liberation, such details seemed of no consequence. I sat there in the wind and thought of the men with affection, but of Willie with the most affection of all. Even though his mind was a vague mist, his devotion was monumental. So many times, I had tried to answer his wistful questions: *Why do they treat us this way? Why do they say we are not men? How can they make slaves of us, when they promised work and wages and good treatment? Mr. Critchfield can't know about this. He is good. He made the promises.*

I would try to explain to Willie how it had happened.

About the treachery. I would say of course Mr. Critchfield, author of the Humane Bill in the World Congress, knew about it. But belief in such treachery was beyond Willie's simple understanding. I would tell him what a chem was and why we were loathed and discriminated against by natural men, but this, he could not understand either, or else he forgot it and asked all over again. And again, I would explain it.

So that would be my crew—my group. All that remained was to free them, but I realized this would be foolish unless I could plan beyond their release. What would lie ahead of us in any direction, except death after torture?

Then a plan so magnificent, so breathtaking, so utterly fantastic and impossible of success occurred to me, that I sat there trembling; not from the cold or the wind, but from the sheer thrill of it.

I turned it back and forth in my mind, afraid of it, hardly daring touch it, but coming closer and closer until I took it in my arms and held it fiercely, knowing that only death would separate me from it. And that death probably would.

My joy was far stronger now, because I had a purpose;

a mad purpose, true, but one for which death at any place along the way, would have a dignity of purpose and would not be the shameful expiring of a mongrel cur under the lash.

Now—the plans. I sat think for a long time; until my body turned numb. But as this occurred, my brain seemed to become correspondingly sharper.

It was not until I raised my head slowly to look over the rim of the compound that I realized how many things were in my favor. Small things, but they were there. No fence around the compound, for instance; and the chems not chained to the walls in their hutches. Because, where could they go on this miserable asteroid? Poor, beaten, miserable wrecks; what reason would they have for leaving the compound? A few armed guards patrolled its perimeter. Entirely sufficient to control them. And even that so unnecessary that the guards had grown lax. They put in their time but scarcely gave the chems a thought while they were doing it.

So a break was possible. And afterward? We would see.

I slipped over the rim of the compound and wormed my way forward until I was against the back wall of the hutch my group slept in. I waited until the guard passed and then whispered, "Victor—Victor."

There was no answer. I knew they all slept the sleep of the totally exhausted, so I risked raising my voice a little. "Victor—Victor. It is I—Arthur."

Then I knew he had been awake and had heard me the first time but had been stunned into silence, because he whispered back, "No—no—it's not possible. My mind is going."

"Your mind is not going. It is I."

"But you fell dead in the shaft."

"It was a masquerade. A spur-of-the-moment thing. I could take no more."

I knew he was marveling at such a mad act. "A wild, crazy thing to do. If you'd been found out, they would have tortured you."

"But they did not find out and now I have a plan. A plan to release the group."

"Madness! Sheer madness."

"Perhaps, but isn't it better to die fighting for a cause than to wait until you drop of exhaustion?"

I was deeply familiar with

Victor; I had known him in the old days on Terra and was well acquainted with his mental reactions. He said, "Perhaps you are right. It had never occurred to me to resist—that is seriously—because it seemed so hopeless, but—"

"To escape is possible. Of course we may die, but we will die anyhow, so we are only gambling a little agony under the torture. And is that so much after what we've been through?"

Victor was beginning to savor it. "Perhaps we could kill a few."

Knowing Victor, this was the reaction I had feared, but I passed it over. "It's a million to one gamble for all of us, but—"

"All of us?"

"Yes. That will be your job. You must talk the other four into making the break. No one must be left in our hutch after the break is made. Besides, we shall need them."

"I don't know — Jamie might—"

"You *have* to convince him. He would be the most dangerous to leave behind."

"I'll do my best," Victor said, doubtfully.

"Good. Be ready tomorrow night about this time."

"Shall we cut a hole through the wall?"

"No. You'd better wait in case something goes wrong and there is a delay. We'll cut the hole when the time comes to use it. That won't take long."

"As you say."

"I'll have to go now. I'll see you tomorrow night."

"We'll be waiting."

"God bless you."

Victor laughed with bitterness. "You presume, my friend. Chems are not permitted to petition God."

"Perhaps all that will be changed."

I wormed my way back as I'd come and just got over the rim when a guard came by. I lay motionless, a new strength rising in me at sight of him. A brutal, sadistic animal. No matter what they said about us chems, we were towering moral figures beside the beasts Critchfield had put over us. And Critchfield was no fool, so that was probably the way he wanted them.

It would have been so easy to rise up and bring the guard down; to throttle him and hold him silent and helpless while I squeezed his throat and took a long time to kill him. But this was luxury I could not afford. A killing at this point would be too expensive. In fact, a death at any

time would jeopardize the plan I had in mind but I was not sure I could hold the group back if it ever was given the chance.

I arose and moved like a shadowy fox through the buildings toward the commissary. It was risky, but come what would, I had to have food. We were given little enough at regular times, so, having missed supper, I was ravenous to the point of physical weakness.

There was a light in the commissary and I could hear voices as I circled the building, gruff voices, and I knew some of the guards were having a late snack: good food, not the bilge and waste fed to the chems. I snaked close to the back window and raised my head until I could hear their words.

"The super's getting rougher every day. Wonder what's wrong with him?"

"Don't you know?"

"How would I. I'm just a guard. I take orders."

"So do I, but I keep my eyes open."

"What are you driving at?"

The voices were harsh and sullen, and I almost fainted from the odor of the roast beef sandwiches they were wolfing down.

"I know what's on his mind.

I went into the office the other day and he wasn't around."

"So?"

"So there was an ethergram on his desk from Critchfield. He dressed the super out for not getting more work hours per chem. Said it was getting harder and harder to recruit them—that he had to offer higher and higher wages."

The other guard burst out in a roar of laughter. "That's the best I've heard for years. Critchfield has never paid a chem one single cent. But he's so tight it even hurts him to have to *offer* more money—money they'll never get."

"Don't be so flippant with Critchfield's name. After all, we're paid plenty. We've no complaint."

"He's got to pay us. We're the most important part of his deal."

I raised my head and looked in and saw the other guard grin. "You're right. How do you suppose he ever got to be a World Congress representative?"

"It just shows how the people can be fooled."

"Do you think the people really care what happens to the chems?"

"I don't know. Maybe they'd just as soon see them all killed off. Then the problem would be eliminated."

"I don't know. They supported Critchfield's Humane Bill."

"They had to—out in public. But their private thoughts were something else, I think."

"In a way, maybe, we're doing humanity a service, eliminating the chems."

The other grinned evilly. "And it's fun, too."

I sank down on the ground outside, weak from anger and frustration. I knew all about Critchfield and his Humane Bill. After all, I had been his personal servant. I knew him for the monster he was more so than anyone else alive. That was no doubt why he wanted me dead. And my being a chem, his problem was simple.

The guards arose from their chairs and left the commissary. I had no way of knowing how soon another pair would enter but it made no difference. Even if the super himself arrived, I had to have food.

I almost got it, too. I piled through the window and my hands were just ready to claw like talons into the big knuckle of beef on the table, when common sense stopped me. I couldn't claw it. I had to cut it in slices, thus leaving no clue of a hunger-crazed invader. I grabbed a knife and

sliced off a broad, inch thick slab and was just picking it up when a sound raised my head. A guard was standing not three feet from me. He'd just entered and I'd been so lost in the meat that my senses had gone momentarily dead.

I was fortunate in that the guard's own surprise held him motionless. He stared at me in unbelief. I'm sure that never before in the history of Critchfield's mines, had a chem got up nerve to invade the commissary. The punishment would be more horrible than mere starvation.

He began unloosening at the top, first. His face twisted into a scowl. But, before he could move his hands, I was on him. Swiftly, silently. And he was also silent because, as I went down on top of him my hands were so tight around his throat that no sound came through. My strength at the moment, was made massive by hatred and the thirst for revenge. He was bigger than I, but I handled him like a huge doll. He was helpless, and the terror in his eyes made me insanely happy. I knelt on his chest and looked down into his face, enjoying every moment of the agony he showed.

Then I knew he was dead.

A reaction set in that left me even weaker than I was. Now all was lost, I told myself bitterly. Now there was nothing for me to do but crouch in a hole and wait for them to haul me out and torture me to death. Perhaps they had special agonies reserved for a chem who killed a guard.

But at least, I would eat before I died. I snatched up the thick slab of beef and a loaf of bread and fled out of the commissary. There was no sound in the pitch darkness except that of my own breathing. And, oddly, there was no fear of death in my heart. Only a terrible anxiety that they would catch me and kill me before I had time to eat what I had stolen. At that moment, the savory odor of the beef and bread was the be-all and end-all of my existence. Nothing was important except enjoying this bit of paradise before death.

I ran until I was weak and then found a hole in the rocks where I was protected from the cold. I sank down and wolfed the food. Then I caught myself and began to eat slowly, enjoying each bite. I finally finished, but only to feel sudden sickness—nausea—and all the fine beef and bread came up.

It had been too much—too

rich a fare for a stomach used to stale bread and a sliver or two of rotten garbage. I lay back in my shelter and wept.

But I felt better. There was the death of the guard to dwell on with satisfaction. This would warm me through the night. It did, for a while, but weariness came and I slept.

Immediately, I started dreaming. I dreamed I was back in the hutch, telling poor, beclouded Willie how all this had come about. Then Willie faded and I was living it all again. I was back in the Critchfield library, pouring drinks. . . .

Critchfield was a tall, pompous man with a dignified manner. This made him impressive and completely hid the evil and the dishonesty that was so much a part of him. He was entertaining another public figure that evening—John Caldwell, a European representative in the World Congress. I had just served them drinks and was leaving the room, when Caldwell said, "Mr. Critchfield, I want to congratulate you on your courage and your greatness in sponsoring the Humane Bill, giving justice to the chems. You will go down in history as a great liberator. You will be as deeply venerated in future

years as Abraham Lincoln."

Critchfield said, "Thank you. That remains to be seen, but here is a similarity in our work."

"Your Humane Bill will be as historic as his Emancipation Proclamation, but I think your risk of ruin is greater than his."

"Perhaps, Mr. Caldwell—"

"Are you sure you've judged the public temper correctly?"

"I hope so. As I see it, there is a strong feeling of resentment in the world against exploiting the chems. I think this lies in people without the courage to stand forth, but if one man takes the lead, I think they will force their representatives in the World Congress to go along."

"I hope you are right—for the sake of your political future."

I had been standing beyond the door, eavesdropping, and I hurried on my way. About an hour later the buzzer in the kitchen rang and I went back to the library.

Mr. Critchfield said, "Arthur, Mr. Caldwell is leaving."

They shook hands and I showed him to the door and if I had gone straight back to the kitchen, I would not have known Mr. Critchfield for what he was and might still

be serving in his house. As it happened, I wondered if he wanted anything more and went toward the library.

I paused at the door, realizing he had someone on the visiphone. I glanced in and saw the face of Sam Courtney, Mr. Critchfield's business manager. Mr. Critchfield had vast business interests and needed a man to supervise them full time.

Courtney was scowling, and I heard him say, "You must be out of your mind, Jack—sponsoring a bill like that. If that passes, you'll cut your own throat."

"It will pass, and I'll do myself no harm whatever."

"That's absurd. You know you need cheap labor in the asteroid mines. So you elevate the chems to the level of human beings—"

"The bill does no such thing. It forestalls that possibility. I happen to know there is a movement afoot to give them human status. That's one of the reasons I'm sponsoring the Humane Bill. If you read it carefully, you'll see that it gives them no rights whatever. It is merely a resolution stating that such rights would be a good thing."

Caldwell scowled anew. "I don't get it, then. Why are you—?"

"For two reasons. The bill heightens my prestige—makes me a great figure in the public eye. It also gives me a chance to slip a rider on the Appropriations Bill for the current year which states that the chems are not human beings and must be classed as animals. It's stated a little more diplomatically than that, but the meaning is there."

Caldwell's eyes opened wide. "Well, for—!"

Critchfield smiled. "I'm no fool, Caldwell. I pushed through the rider very quietly. No one knows it's there because all eyes are on the Humane Bill. On the strength of the rider, we're legally justified in treating chems as animals."

"Smart manipulation. We're covered for the future, but one problem remains."

"What problem?"

"Getting the chems to the asteroids. We can hardly kidnap them."

"I'm afraid you aren't very bright, Caldwell. Can't you see the possibilities opened up by my sponsoring the Humane Bill?"

"Not in relation to—"

"Think, man! As the leader of the new movement, they will trust me. We will offer them good wages, fine living quarters, anything they want

in order to get them to sign up. Then, when we have them away from here—out in space—"

Caldwell grinned. "Guess I was a little stupid. After all, a chem has no relatives. There are no females to complicate things—"

"Exactly. And no one can touch us if there are any leaks. Working an animal to death is a misdemeanor—nothing more."

"There won't be any leaks."

"I'm sure there won't."

They broke the connection a few moments later and I made another mistake. I entered the library instead of retreating to the kitchen.

Mr. Critchfield looked up sharply. "Have you been standing at the door?"

"No, sir," I lied. "I just came to see if there was anything you wanted."

My expression must have mirrored my sudden new loathing for him, however, because he was not convinced. He said, "Nothing more," and I left.

My first thought was to expose him, but I realized quickly how futile any such attempt would be. I was a chem. No one paid any attention to chems. I could not even get to anyone of importance to tell

my story. And if I were able to, they would not listen. As a result, I did nothing and things went as Mr. Critchfield had planned.

In a way, I deserved what I later got because I listened to him promise the chems good wages, good conditions, and the dignity of humane treatment—and I did nothing. I saw them sign up by the hundreds while Mr. Critchfield was lauded publicly as a great leader. I saw them blast off into space and made no move to stop them. In fact, so convincing was Mr. Critchfield's act of betrayal—so genuine did his sincerity appear—that I wondered if I had actually heard those things that night in his library.

Any doubts I had vanished when I went to bed one night and awoke in a space freighter; seated with other chems on a hard, narrow bench, my ankles manacled together. Mr. Critchfield obviously felt I'd heard too much and he'd gotten rid of me.

But, as I said, I probably deserved it because I'd betrayed my race. . . .

I awoke suddenly from the half-stupor in which I had either dreamed or consciously remembered all this. My body was numb with cold. I felt

completely at peace and wanted only to lie there and rest. But I realized I was freezing to death, so I forced myself to get up and move about. I kept moving until the sun shot up over the narrow horizon, warming the asteroid instantly. Then I crawled into my hiding place and waited for the guards to come and find me.

But they did not come. Time passed. I saw the chems being marched to the mines. Things were going on as usual except that there seemed to be more activity than usual in the super's building. Guards were coming and going all morning and finally I realized the true state of affairs. The murder of the guard in the commissary was being attributed to some other guard!

Of course! Why had I not thought of that before? No one would dream that a chem would have the nerve to attack a guard—or be in the commissary in the first place. But the guards were hard, rough brutes. It followed that they could kill each other. Perhaps it had happened before.

I was greatly relieved. Hunger gnawed at me but there was nothing I could do. Except sleep, perhaps. I closed my eyes and dozed off. . . .

I awoke with a start. Darkness had settled over the asteroid. Frightened, I checked the position of the stars and found that the sun had only just set. I came out of my hole and stretched my numb muscles. I was deeply depressed. Then I remembered that this was the night! By morning, I would either be dead or free of the accursed asteroid. My spirits immediately brightened and the mental sharpness of the previous night returned to me.

I was still hungry, but the sensation was not as sharp; only a dull, gnawing ache in my stomach. I should have been very weak, but I was not, and I realized I was now running on nervous energy that could give out at any moment.

Praying that it would not, I moved back toward the compound and waited until the guard passed before going over the rim. I snaked my way to the hutch and tapped on the wall.

Victor answered immediately. "Arthur?"

"Yes."

"Thank God you're still alive!"

"What's the situation in there?"

"Good, except for Jamie. He—"

"He *must* come with us!"

Then I heard Jamie's voice—clear but marked with fear and uncertainty. "It's—it's all right, I guess. I'll come."

"Good boy! Victor, you'd better break the hole from the inside. While you work, I'll tell you part of my plan."

He went to work on the mud wall. "I'm listening."

"The garbage scow goes out tonight."

He was uncertain. "Are you sure? I know it goes out some nights, but it may go on days also."

"No. They always do it at night because the guards are needed for the mines during the day. It goes tonight—in about forty-five Terran minutes."

"Very well. What is your plan?"

"We leave the compound and hide in the bonepile. They throw us on the garbage scow. After it takes off, we rise and overpower the guards and the ship is ours."

"I don't know. It's a daring plan. It could fail so easily."

"Of course it could fail! But what do we have to lose? Come, Victor! I have no time to lie here trying to convince you."

There was silence from within except low whispers I could hear but could not make out. Victor had stopped work-

ing on the hole. Then he began again. He said, "All right. "We'll go with you. At least, we can all die together."

The soft wall broke through. We all stayed silent for a moment, testing the night for possible detection. There seemed to be none. I said, "All right! Quiet now—!"

Victor came out first. Willie followed me, his great shoulders hulking in the darkness. His gentle face passed close to mine and I smiled and gripped his arm. "Good boy!" I whispered.

"There was never any doubt in me," he said. "I go where you go. I die when you die."

My throat tightened as I passed him on. Marko came next, emaciated, silent, and I thought I could hear his unupholstered bones grinding together as he passed me. The grim-faced Hans came next.

Then Jamie.

But Jamie was only half-way out when I knew we had trouble. His face was close to mine and I saw the sudden terror rise in it. Then his lips came back in a snarl. "No!" he screamed. "I won't do it! I won't be tortured! I'll tell them and then they'll give me food"

Poor, beaten Jamie! I got

my hand over his mouth as I saw the words coming and his scream was muffled in his throat. I had no anger for him—only pity, as I closed my other hand over his throat and squeezed.

I held him there and said a prayer for him as I killed him. And I had to steel myself hard in order to go through with it; like killing a brother; even worse, because no one can be closer than a fellow sufferer.

But it had to be done. There was so much at stake. This was no time for sentimentality. The issue had to be regarded starkly through cold eyes and that was the way I regarded it as I felt the last feeble glow of life leave Jamie's thin body.

I felt sick and realized I would have to explain my brutal act to the other four; I realized my whole plan might collapse at that point. How would they react to the cold murder of one of the group? I turned to seek Victor and try to explain.

But he and the rest were just as quick to grasp the situation as I. They may have been reluctant to begin the adventure, but once in it, they would stay to the end.

Victor grasped my arm and whispered, "It's all right—all

right. You had to do it. If you hadn't, I'd have killed him. There are five other lives involved."

Possibly far more than that," I whispered back. "Let's go."

We wormed along single file on our bellies and got to the rim of the compound where I gave the signal to hold. It looked as though we would make it safely and my hopes arose. I signalled them over the rim, and then followed.

But five shadows are far easier to detect than one, and in going over the rim, we attracted the attention of a guard. We heard his grunt of inquiry and froze, hoping he would turn around and go quietly away.

The hope was wasted. He stood for a moment and then approached. He came slowly, casually, evidently not greatly alarmed. The thought of a chem trying to escape was far from his mind.

I thought he still might miss us in the darkness and give up. But he came straight on and I could hear him fumbling for his flash. I waited, my hand tight on Willie's arm. Holding myself in as the clumping steps approached was the hardest job I ever did. Then, when they were close

enough, I whispered, "Take him, Willie!"

Willie rose up from the ground and put his huge hands on the guard. He put them in the right place, because the guard's scream did not come out. Willie pulled him down and I saw a bubble of froth on his gaping mouth. I saw his bulging eyes and his neck constricted tight under Willie's great fist. Willie was killing him as he would kill a chicken for dinner. I leaped desperately upon the guard's legs to keep them from kicking around and making noise enough to attract attention.

And it was thus that he died; held tight and choked to death by those he had brutalized. Perhaps I should have felt satisfaction in that, but there was no time. I whispered, "Bring him along, Willie. We can't leave him here."

Willie picked him up like a bundle of hay and carried him under his arm as we rose up and moved away from the compound.

As we walked, Victor moved up beside me and I could see the dim smile on his face. "That was good," he whispered. "Very good. Like food and drink. One can sometimes make a meal on vengeance."

"Yes," I said, "but in this

case I wish it had not happened."

"Why? The garbage scow will leave before they find him. Our fate will be decided before dawn."

"True, but in the long run we would be better off if we killed no one."

I knew he was frowning. "I don't understand you."

"This one makes little difference, I guess. Whatever damage could be done by murder, was done last night when I killed one in the commissary."

"You killed a guard and you're still free?" Victor was astounded.

"They probably thought it was done by another guard."

He wanted the details, but did not ask. This was not the time or the place. He said, "At least, we've got a gun, now. I already took it from his holster."

"Hang onto it. We'll probably have to use it on the ship."

We moved on with Victor shaking his head and muttering to himself. "—doesn't want to kill any of them. I don't understand that at all—"

We reached the boneyard in twenty minutes. There, we did not have to be so careful as no one was near to hear us.

I said, "Now we must lie on the pile of dead ones until the ship comes. When they gather us up, be very quiet. Let your bodies hang loose when they handle you because the time of rigor mortis for these poor devils has passed. Do you all understand?"

"Yes," Hans grunted, "but let's burrow in under the pile and get warm. I'm freezing to death."

"We must lie on top and take the cold. It won't be long. Remember, they will not expect to handle warm corpses. The cold may be the difference between success and failure."

"That makes sense," Marko said. It was the first time he'd spoken since leaving the hutch.

"All right," I said. "Let's get our positions. Make yourselves as comfortable as possible so you won't get a cramp and be tempted to move at the wrong moment. Remember, from now until blast-off—we're all dead."

It seemed a thousand years before we heard the swish of the idling jet easing the garbage scow down beside the bonepile. But hear it we did, and also the eternal clump of the guards' heavy boots as they came to do their job.

They went at it with the

same distaste any man would go at the job of moving garbage, but with no added distaste. The chems were not looked on as humans despite the fact that their only physical difference was lack of an umbilical scar. Not having been born of woman, there had been no need of an umbilical cord. Otherwise, we were identical—except, of course, that we had no souls. This made us worse off than even the black slaves of ancient times because no matter how badly they were treated, they were still men with souls.

I was picked up by head and heels and thrown into the conveyor that was poked down from the wall of the garbage scow. I felt myself lifted on the belt and wondered how the rest were faring. I heard no sound to indicate that the guards had found us out.

I came to the top of the conveyor and was tipped over into the ship. I fell. It seemed miles, but I forced myself to remain limp and landed on other bodies with only my breath knocked out. But as I was not supposed to have any, this could have been poetic justice.

I heard a grunt as one of the others hit the bottom of the hold. Then the port was closed and there was silence.

I waited for a few minutes and then began burrowing my way toward the top.

When I got clear of the dead ones, I found Marko and Hans and Willie already clear—Willie giving Victor a hand. Victor wiped some filth from his face and said, "Well, we made it this far—what's the next move?"

"Now we try to take over the ship."

"And if we fail?"

"We get dumped into space," Hans growled, "to float forever with the rest of the stiff's."

"Maybe we can make Andromeda for lunch in about seven million light years," Marko said grimly.

"I'll look around," I said. The place was pitch dark and I could only feel my way along the walls. I came to what seemed to be a door, but went on until I'd gone completely around the hold and then returned to it. "This is the only way in or out," I told them, "but we'll probably be trapped here until we come to the dumping sector. They won't enter the hold until then."

"We'll probably choke to death," Hans said. "There's no reason why they should pump air in here."

"Let's hope we get where we're going before what we

have runs out. Now all we can do is wait."

"All right," Victor said. "So they do come in here. What is your plan?"

I shrugged in the darkness. "A man can plan only so far. To succeed, we've got to take over the ship and to do that, we must trust to luck."

"How many men are aboard?"

"No more than the group of guards, I'm sure. There were four of them."

"We have one gun. We'd better kill whoever comes in here—that is, if anyone does come." This from Marko, who was sparing with his words.

I said, "Don't be so pessimistic. And I want no killing if we can avoid it. I have my reasons. You'd better give me the gun."

"What are they?" Victor asked, handing it over.

"I'd rather not go into them just now. I hope you'll trust me."

"Of course," Hans said, drily. "All we've got to lose is our lives. I'd trust a valueless thing like that to you anytime. Now if I had a dollar in my pocket, that would be different."

His tone was half humorous—half resentful. I prayed that things would go well

among us. It would be hard enough without dissension in the group. Then, as I was pondering how to handle any trouble, Willie said, very quietly. "We will do exactly as Arthur asks. Is that clear to all of you?"

There was a dead silence as they digested the import of his words and considered his massive strength. I laughed and said, "There's no need for that kind of talk. We all have a common objective. We'll stick together."

The rocket blasted off at that moment and the shock, though mild, was enough to make everyone look to their breathing. The sudden upward drive flattened our lungs and momentarily paralyzed our diaphragms.

After normalcy returned, there was still silence among us. Perhaps there was too much on our minds for words. Then I felt Willie's great hand on my arm. He said, "Arthur, tell me why they treat us this way. Why do they say we are not men?"

"Because we have no umbilical scar," Marko snapped bitterly. "That is certainly enough."

"But, Arthur," Willie said. "How did it happen?"

"I've told you a dozen times how it happened."

"Yes, but—but I can never seem to remember—"

"Four men and a halfwit trying to break out of the devil's own stronghold," Hans growled, busy with his own thoughts.

"Stop it!" I said sharply. "Willie will probably prove to be the most valuable of us all."

Willie had ignored the remarks; or perhaps, with his mind upon me, had not even heard it. His mind was like that. It could not go in two directions at once. He said, "Tell me, Arthur—"

"Once, there was a man named Healy—a scientist—who said he could solve God's last secret—the creation of human life. He said he could cause men to be born from a chemical beginning. He said life was nothing more than the correct combination of chemicals and electronic impulses functioning in unison. It was his theory that all life force sprang from the ether and that a certain chemical combination caused it to manifest." I patted Willie's hand. "Can you understand that?"

"Oh, yes," he said, solemnly, "but I like the part about the incubators."

"Then you do remember some of it," I said, smiling.

"Yes, the incubators, but tell me again."

"Well, this great scientist experimented and caused life to begin in a sort of saline solution. Tiny sacs began to form. He had many failures before he succeeded, but when his process was perfected, we and all like us, were created and born out of those sacs. So, in reality, we were not born—we were hatched."

Hans suddenly broke in. "But why," he shouted, "did they not stop him then? If they planned to hate and revile us, why did they not stop our human creator?"

I reached out to touch him. "They'll hear you! Quiet. The guards know corpses can't shout!"

Victor's deep, quiet voice came out of the darkness. "You know the reason, Hans. Mankind has the admirable faculty of adjusting its morals to the needs of the moment. When Healy made his great discovery, there was a need for additional manpower for work beyond the ionosphere; planets to be developed; asteroids to be worked, and this sort of labor was not popular with those who had control over their own destinies. High wages did not lure many men off Terra. So Healy was allowed to go on with his work

even though he was criticized and called a demon. Then, when the bulk of the hard work was done, mankind's moral indignation burned bright, and Healy was not only stopped, but was executed as an arch criminal." Victor was not telling Hans anything he did not know. I think he was speaking mainly to pass the time faster.

Willie said, "But we are willing to do the work, so why do they treat us so badly?"

"It's rather complicated, Willie," I said. "Healy, oddly enough, was able to create only males. Perhaps a female is more complicated in structure. Anyhow, God reserved that task for Himself and did not share it with our human father, so the people knew that their problem of having soulless chems among them would end with the death of the chems. You see, their moral righteousness had reasserted itself and they could not slaughter us and look each other in the face, nor could they force us into the shame of slavery."

"They would have forced us into slavery if all the vital labor had not been done," Hans said.

"Anyhow, we were allowed to skulk around doing menial jobs while we waited to grow

old and die. Then Mr. Critchfield conceived his great idea."

"He made slaves of us," Willie said.

"That's right, but he did it cleverly. He gained our confidence by sponsoring a bill that gave us wider freedom to compete with humans for better jobs."

"Then he offered us big wages to work in his mines." Willie spoke eagerly, as though proud of remembering that.

"He did, and we believed him, but, he also got a law passed, very quietly, which said we were not men—that we were no more than animals. With this legal backing, no one can hold him for murder, though he kills us daily in his mines. That is—if anyone ever discovers what goes on out here."

"No one ever will," Marko said. "We are too far from Terra."

"Arthur," Hans said, "You worked for Critchfield once, didn't you?"

I cringed, glad no one could see my face as my feeling of guilt returned. I alone, of all the chems, had known of Critchfield's duplicity. But I had done nothing. Thus, I was a traitor to my own kind. I had justified my cowardice by telling myself I could do nothing.

ing about it—that no one would believe a chem. I knew in my heart, though, that this was a mere alibi. I personally, was safe—or thought I was—so I had allowed the rest of the chems to be deceived into slavery and death. The fact that Critchfield thought I knew of his plan and did not trust me, did not make my crime lighter. In fact, there was irony in the punishment I'd received—drugged and shipped off to join the rest of the chems in their horrible fate. Of all the thousands, I was the only one who had really deserved it.

Willie said, "But Arthur—"

Victor reached forward and touched me. "Wait—quiet, Willie! We're floating in free space."

It was true. The jets had stopped. We had obviously arrived. I said, "Come—we'll wait by the door."

We felt our way along the walls until the door-frame touched my hand. "All right—hold it now. Willie—you stand there—on the other side. When the door opens and the guard comes in, I want you to take him by the throat so he can't yell and then knock him unconscious. Don't kill him. Just knock him out. We'll get his gun and then wait very quietly until another comes to

see what happened to him. That way, we might put two of them out of commission."

"I will do as you say."

The wait was interminable. Then we heard the lugs thrown on the far side of the door and it opened. The guard who stepped through did not know what hit him. In fact, he would never know because Willie's fist came around too hard and the guard's skull was crushed like an egg shell.

I snatched the guard's gun and saw Willie's mouth open. I knew he was going to tell me he was sorry, but I got my hand over it in time to keep him from speaking. I pressed him backward and we waited again.

After a little time, a second guard advanced down the corridor. I could see his scowl as I looked out of the darkness. He called, "What are you doing in there, Renner? Talking to the stiff's? Unlock that hatch. We're due back right now."

When there was no reply, the guard came forward cautiously. It must have been pure instinct because he certainly couldn't have expected the first guard to get into trouble among a pile of dead chems. At any rate, he advanced only to the doorway and peered in.

I knew he was not going to

enter and yelled, "Grab him, Willie!"

But before Willie's slow brain could function, the guard had jumped back and was on the alert. He yelled, "Trouble in hold!" in a voice that must have carried to the control cabin.

"Kill him," Victor barked. "Cut him down, you fool!"

Even then, I hesitated. Killing was not part of my grand strategy. But there was nothing else to do. Self-preservation came first. So I brought the gun up and the ray cut him in two just as he was escaping through the forward end of the corridor.

With no further use for secrecy, we surged out into the corridor. "What do we do now?" Victor asked.

I said, "Try to take the ship. There should be two of them left. I'll lead the way."

We went forward, over the body of the dead second guard and into the main corridor. Ahead of us was nothing but cold metal walls, closed doors, and silence.

Hans whispered, "Do you think there were only two of them? Is the ship ours?"

"No," I told him. "I'm sure there were at least four."

"Do you think they didn't hear the guard yell?"

"It seems impossible, unless they were asleep."

"The only thing to do is try some of the doors," Victor said, "and see if we can find them."

Anything was better than standing where we were. I led a slow march forward. At every step, my nerves tightened. Something was wrong here.

"Blast at anyone who shows himself," Victor whispered. "I don't know what your plans were, but four dead are no worse than two."

We advanced, but only into silence and desertion. No doors opened. No heads appeared. Finally, Victor could stand it no longer. "I'm going to try this one," he said, and grasped the closest door handle.

It was not locked and it opened easily. I peered over Victor's shoulder. It was the galley. On a ship of this size, the men ate in the galley, and four unused plates were set upon the table.

"It's empty," I said, "Let's go on."

I was supposed to be the leader, but my command was taken over by something far stronger—a big baked ham in a platter in the middle of the table.

Willie was close behind me.

He saw the ham. "Food!" he cried, and I rocketed into the galley and landed on my hands and knees as he shoved me. When I got to my feet, he was at the table with the ham in his hands. The others—all but Victor—crowded near him, reaching. I said, "Stop it! Put that down! We'll have time for food later! There's a ship to take, now!"

They didn't even hear me. Hans was yelling, "Divide it! Divide it! It's not all yours! We're hungry too!"

Willie snarled and held the ham high. "It's mine," he growled. "Mine and Arthur's."

But watching the front, he could not guard the rear, and Marko snatched the ham and whirled to put the table between himself and Willie. There was murder in Willie's famished eyes as he turned on Marko. The latter already had the meat to his mouth and had bitten out a huge chunk. He chewed swiftly, evidently intending to get at least one taste of heaven before Willie killed him.

I threw myself on Willie, desperately attempting to hold him back and restore order. He brushed me off like a fly and lunged across the table. Marko danced backward, still chewing, just evading Willie's outstretched hands. Then we

all froze—suddenly—as a single unit: Willie still stretched across the table, Marko with the ham held high.

The door had slammed.

In horror, we stood there listening to the bolt being thrown from the outside. We were trapped!

A sickness spread over me; a sickness and a shame. We were through. We were dead men. But that in itself was not nearly as bad in my mind as the method in which we had been taken. Like stupid animals, we'd fallen into a trap baited with a cooked ham. Tears of rage and frustration came into my eyes and I beat the hard table with my fists. Taken like stupid animals! Maybe Critchfield and all the rest were right! Maybe we deserved no better. We asked to be called men, but would men be turned from their objective by a piece of meat?

As I stood there dining on despair, Marko's jaws again began to move up and down. Willie's arms again reached out for the ham, and a panel opened above our heads along the edge of the ceiling.

Two faces appeared; evil, contemptuous faces. Contemptuous eyes looked down at us as they would look down on five trapped rats. The

guards. One of them looked at the other and said, "I wonder when they start squealing?"

The other said, "Oh, not for quite a while. They have food and they're warm. That's all animals ask. They can't think beyond the next minute."

"Shall we kill them now, or wait a while?"

The other guard frowned. "I don't think we'd better kill them at all."

"You're crazy! We've got to—"

"If they hadn't killed Max and Evan, I'd say, yes. But we've got to go back and report, and unless we've got them alive, the super will never believe they could do what they did."

"I guess maybe you're right."

I knew this was the end and I would have preferred a quick merciful death. I said, "Kill us now, you swine! Shoot us down from that hole where we can't get at you, or I swear you'll go with us."

I had the gun hidden behind my back, but I was afraid to use it. If I killed them we would be forever trapped in this room because the opening through which they watched was too small for the smallest of us to escape through. Of course, we were doomed anyhow and it made little differ-

ence, but so long as life exists, one is reluctant to cut it off irrevocably, no matter what the odds.

The two guards were grinning at me. "You'd think he was in command," one said to the other.

A moment later, they closed the opening and I heard it lock. I looked at Victor. "What do you suppose their plan is?"

He smiled in grim discouragement. "Do they need one? Does one need a plan to kill five stupid pigs in a sty?" He looked at Marko who was again raising the ham to his mouth and I knew his shame was akin to my own.

Hans scowled and said, "Well, if we have to die, I'm going to have my share of that ham!"

I knew there would be murder in the group if the matter of the food was not settled, so I took a knife from the table and held out my hand. "Give me the meat."

Marko scowled and took a backward step.

"I will cut it in shares. If you want to die with full stomachs, let's do it like men, not like beasts."

A slight flush of shame came into Marko's sallow cheeks and he put the ham on the table. I cut it into slices

and they began eating. I turned away and sat down. After a few minutes, Victor came over and extended a slice. "Here—you might as well eat. We'll need all the strength we can get for what lies ahead."

I had no chance to reply because at that moment, Victor stiffened and a strange look came into his face. He glanced swiftly around the room and the slice of meat in his hand dropped to the floor. "Don't you notice it?" he said.

"Notice what?"

"It's getting harder to breathe."

He was right. I'd been so engrossed in my agonized thoughts, that I hadn't noticed my difficulty in getting a breath. Now I did. "The air—the oxygen is going!"

"That's right. No wonder they weren't worried. They've closed the intake valve into this room."

I raised a hand. "Listen." There was a faint hissing. "More than that. They're pumping it out!"

Victor raised his doubled fists. "They won't even let us have the little that's left!"

"Stop feeling sorry for yourself and try to find the vent! We can stop it off and save a little!"

The other three, engrossed in their eating, had not even

heard us. They paid no attention and we had to push them aside as we feverishly hunted for the vent.

Victor found it. He called out, and as I turned, I saw his shoulders sag in discouragement. I ran to his side and he pointed. "Down there—behind that steel panel. The devils figure all possibilities, even when they build these flying coffins. We haven't a chance in the world of getting anything down behind that panel to stop the flow."

He straightened up and I put a hand on his shoulder. "Well, it's a minor defeat because it makes so little difference. A few more minutes of life."

Victor frowned. "But they said they weren't going to kill us—yet."

"They evidently changed their minds."

The pump worked so fast, I had hardly time to reach a bench before my strength failed me. As I fell across the bench my blurring eyes were on the floor and I saw what looked like a gun. One's mind works strangely on the threshold of death and mine was no exception. I wondered if I had been so stupid as to drop my gun. I raised my arm with great effort and touched my pocket. The gun was still

there. This, then, was another gun—one a guard had dropped. As consciousness faded, I made a titanic effort to pick it up and put it in my pocket. Such an unimportant thing at an utterly hopeless time.

I turned on the bench and the last things I saw was Victor huddled on the floor; Willie clutching at his throat; Marko, falling; Hans still munching steadily away at his meat . . .

Slowly and painfully consciousness returned. I opened my eyes and saw Victor struggling to a sitting position. His face had a sickly hue and his mouth was open like the mouth of a fish as he gulped air.

We looked around in wonder. The room was again charged with oxygen. "I—I don't understand," Victor muttered.

I looked at the others. Marko and Hans were still unconscious, but their chests were rising and falling. Willie was sitting up, propped against the leg of a table, an injured, dumb-animal expression on his face. I felt a surge of the warmth one always feels for the more unfortunate. Willie was not a good argument for the chems' bid to be accepted into the human

race, but men also had their less presentable exhibits.

I got to my feet and walked to the table. I was suddenly so ravenous I could understand the earlier actions of the others. Live or die, I had to have some food. As I crammed the meat into my mouth, the overhead panel opened and the faces of the two guards again appeared. They sneered in unison. "See?" one of them said. "Dumb animals. That one almost died. But he's forgotten in a moment and is now interested only in filling his stomach."

I hurled the meat at the opening with a roar of rage. It missed and they laughed at me. "That was just a sample of what we can do to you," I was told. "Just a warning—so when the time comes for us to open the door, you'd better walk out peaceably."

The panel slammed shut. I looked at Victor. He shrugged. "Of course we'll walk out," he said. "What else is there to do? Maybe if we're good they won't torture us quite as much as they would otherwise."

I sank down on a bench at the absolute low point of my resistance. "Why not?" I said. "What's the use of fighting when we're completely beaten. Only an animal does that—a

tiger. Let's prove we're smarter than animals."

Victor had gone over and knelt down beside Marko. He straightened. "The shock was too great. He's dead."

I looked at Victor and then at the ham bone on the table. "Now there'll be more meat for the rest of us. . . ."

But my appetite was gone and I wanted no meat. I sat staring at the wall.

The rocket set down on the asteroid some time later; how much later, I do not know. Time made little difference there in the galley. But we knew the rocket was now grounded and that there was activity around it. Hans had sunk into a stupor. Victor was seated beside me rubbing his skeletal hands together, looking straight ahead out of sunken eyes. He said, "We would have been better off if we hadn't tried this."

I said, "Yes."

"Then at least, we would have been given the privilege of dropping dead from exhaustion. There is not much dignity in such a death, but there is a little."

"You are right," I said. "I'm sorry I misled you."

"It was not your fault. We could have refused."

Willie was on his feet look-

ing at the door. "You know," he said, "I think I could break it down."

"Don't try," I told him. "It's too late—"

At that moment, we heard the bolts thrown and the door opened. I leaped forward and caught Willie by the arm. I think he would have killed anyone he could have gotten his hands on and the thought flashed into my mind that Willie, for all his weak mind, was the staunchest soldier of us all. He had the stubborn courage we lacked.

A guard stepped into the room as I pulled Willie back. The guard showed only one emotion. Contempt. He extended his hand. "Give me the gun, pig."

I reached into my pocket and got one and held it forth.

The guard took the weapon and waved it under my nose. "Not even courage enough to kill yourselves. Well, you'll wish you had, you fools."

I almost smiled. He had complimented us. One does not call a beast a fool. That insult is reserved for men. The guard looked down at Marko's body and rolled it over with his foot. The body was so light from starvation that little effort was entailed.

"Out," he said. "March."

We went out in single file,

Willie first—so I could watch and restrain him if he lost his head—then the rest of us. There were guards stationed along the way, each one blazing hatred as we passed; and even under the conditions I wondered why they hated us so. Willie had asked that question and I'd tried to tell him. But I could not even explain it to myself.

Outside, they made us stand in line beside the ship. I wondered what we were waiting for. In a short time I found out; when the super himself came striding toward the ship from the settlement. He was a huge man with a dark face that would be unpleasant under any circumstances. Now it made him look like the devil himself advancing upon the most miserable lost soul in the deepest depths of hell to mete out personal punishment. Was he going to beat us to death where we stood? That was not impossible.

He came and stood before us and glared at us without a word. He stood this way for a long time, then he said, "You would have been better off if you'd taken your own lives in the ship."

Only Willie had an answer for him. Willie said, "We wouldn't do a thing like that. We aren't cowards."

Rage flared in the super's eyes. He took a quick step toward Willie and raised the club he was carrying. Willie stood with his head high, refusing to cringe.

And in that brief instant when the club hung poised in the air—I acted. I leaped forward and thrust my gun into the super's back.

Thus are momentous acts accomplished, acts which would go otherwise undone, because no one—least of all, I—have the courage, or the foolhardiness, to attempt an impossibility. As I stood there, I had no idea what my next step would be, and it was only by pure chance that I did not pull the trigger.

But the next move followed naturally. I said the obvious thing, "One move—any of you—and he's dead!"

The guards hesitated. "You fool—!" the super grated.

"Then possibly you'd like one of them to make a move?"

A nearby guard was raising his gun. The super went pale. "No! No! That's not the way—"

"What is, then?" I asked softly, because, quite suddenly, I began to enjoy my position of power. I, a despised chem, stood on Critchfield's asteroid, and held all opera-

tions at a standstill. Through a combination of a single small gun and the super's cowardice, I was in command!

The thought broadened and bloomed. If he commanded them to hold their fire at this stage, why not indefinitely? Why not during the time I worked my will completely upon the beast?

The super said, "What do you want? What are you looking for?"

A stupid question. The insane urge to toy with him entered my mind. "Not much. Just something to eat before we die. A meal in the commissary."

He scowled. "I guess that can be arranged."

I feigned eagerness. "You mean that if I throw this gun away, you will see to it that we are escorted to the commissary and served any food we ask for?"

"Why, of course!" he smiled. "I'll give you a royal banquet. Perhaps you deserve it."

"And afterwards," I said meekly. "Afterwards, will you kill us gently—swiftly and painlessly? I don't think I could stand torture."

A glitter came into his eyes and I knew the idiot was taking me seriously. "I tell you what I'll do," he said. "You may eat your fill and then

rest. Then, when you are ready, you can go back to work and nothing will be said of this incident."

Oddly enough, my respect for him increased a little; or rather, a slight grain of respect came into my being. Because, if he actually thought me that stupid, his contempt for the chems was justified.

"How about it?" he said, eagerly.

I lashed out suddenly with the gun, slashing him across the head. A red gash appeared. I moved in close and locked one arm behind his back and jammed the gun into his ribs. I said, "Enough of this. I've got nothing to lose in killing you, so give orders that we be allowed to reboard the ship with you as a hostage. Otherwise, I'll bake your guts with a slow beam from this gun and listen to you scream before I die."

His face was a ghastly combination of pasty flesh and dripping blood. "Wait—wait—"

"The time has run out. Give either order you like. You have a choice. Victory with your liver fried, or defeat with healthy insides. I've gone too far to care which, so I'll give you twenty seconds."

He struggled a little against the pressure on his arm, but a

fresh thrust of the gun stiffened him. I touched the safety of the gun and held it. The barrel tip heated and burned through his jacket. He moaned. "Let them board, you men! It's an order! We'll settle things later."

"Into the ship!" I called.

Victor and Hans obeyed. Willie hesitated and I had to order him a second time. As I backed up the ramp pulling the super with me, he grated, "Who left a gun on this fool?" He was speaking to the guards who stood helplessly watching.

There was no answer and as we drew back into the ship, I said, "Tell them to bolt the port after it's closed. We're taking off and we can't do it without the lugs being thrown, so if they don't bolt it this is the end for us and I'll kill you regardless."

"Bolt the port," he said.

Victor leaped forward and swung the port into place. We waited. Nothing happened. I touched the safety again and the super screamed, "Bolt it, you apes! That's an order."

A moment later, we heard the lugs fall into place.

As this occurred, Victor dropped, white-faced, onto a bench, sheer wonder glowing in his eyes. "It is done!" he

muttered. "Actually done! You forced him to obey."

"No time for cheers," I said. "We've got to get this tub off the asteroid." I goaded the super with the gun and said, "That way. Down the corridor." I opened the first door I came to and shoved him inside and locked the door.

The rest had tagged along behind. "Come on," I said, and led them into the pilot room. There we stopped to catch our breath.

Willie's eyes were shining. "What do we do now, Arthur?" I looked at him and smiled. For all his mental weakness, fear was unknown to him; courage was built into his great bones. I said, "We've got to fire the automatic starter and get this tub into space."

The procedure was rather simple, and while they sat watching, I pressed the primer and ignited the pilot charge. The dial needle climbed out of the red into the blue. When it was perpendicular, I said, "Down!" and they went flat to the floor. I got into the pilot's seat and pressed the switch and a giant thumb pushed down on us for about ten seconds. Then momentum caught up with us and the pressure vanished. I got out of the chair and set the auto-

matic pilot and said, "Let's eat. . . ."

". . . so of course it only postpones our doom," Victor said cheerfully as he licked his fingers, "but I'll be eternally grateful to you for the privilege of sharing it. This almost makes the drudgery in the mines worthwhile."

"Freedom?" Hans asked. "We're trapped like rats in this scow. We either surrender or drift around until death comes for us from that direction. We've gone no place."

Willie scowled at him. "Would you rather be back in the mines?"

Hans thought it over. "No. Because as we are, there is a moment of supreme pleasure coming to me."

"What moment are you talking about?"

Hans raised his eyes. They gleamed with a touch of insanity. "The death of the super. He is mine. I serve notice now, that I will have him. I will kill him just as he planned to kill us, though I may be able to think up a few novel twists that will make his death even worse."

The look in Hans's eyes chilled us for a moment. I said, "That's the least of our problems. First—about drift-

ing in space until we die. That may not be necessary."

"But where can we go?" Victor asked. "This tub has a fixed orbit that will carry us only in a circle. When they get around to it, they'll come out and blast us to bits—merely an alternative fate from the drifting."

"I don't think they will blast us with the super aboard until they get instructions to do so from Critchfield."

"Then they'll get them and that will be that."

"Perhaps—and then, perhaps not. Critchfield may prefer that we be allowed to drift until we die. Remember—ships sufficiently armed to melt this tub down are all registered. He could no doubt get one, but does he want this rebellion to become public knowledge?"

"You may be right. If you are, we go back to our first method of dying."

"Perhaps—perhaps not," I repeated. "I have a plan—"

Hans scowled. "You're just talking to keep our spirits up. We aren't stupid! What possible plan could you put into effect while we drift in circles?"

"Perhaps we won't drift in circles."

Hans got up from the table. "Do as you like. None of it

makes any sense. I'm going to take a long sleep."

After he left, Victor said, "Do you mind telling us your plan, Arthur?"

"I'll tell you some of it. The rest is too fantastic to throw at you in one piece. But about drifting in circles—I've done a little navigation study and there is a way to make an orbitted ship do as you wish."

"In heaven's name—how?"

"By taking advantage of drift. You lay a course and integrate it with your orbital dimensions. Then, when your angle is right, you kill your motors and ride cosmic drift until you slide off your beam. As soon as that happens, you charge up and go into another orbit and do the same thing over again. The result is a series of orbits moving in the general direction you wish to go. All you have to do is keep this up until you blunder into the gravitational pull of a planet. Then the automatic radar control takes care of setting you down."

Victor's eyes were wide. "It could be done!"

Willie eyed me with frank adoration. "Arthur can do anything. He's—he's—like a god."

I reacted with inner bitterness. Like a god! I would have

settled for the rank of an ordinary human being.

Victor's face was alight, now. "Great heavens! We can go anywhere we choose provided we aren't pursued. To another galaxy. Another system. We can find a place where we can live with dignity and be free!"

"The range of this tub is limited."

"But there are plenty of worlds within that range."

"Perhaps," I said. I did not wish to go into it at this time because I had other plans. Nor did I wish to present my plan. The chance of their refusing it was great and I thought it best to remain silent.

I was relieved of the necessity of hedging, though, because at that moment, a terrible scream echoed through the ship. We sprang up as one and ran into the corridor.

"From the prison room!" Victor yelled.

We ran down the corridor. The door to the room in which I had imprisoned the super was open. We crowded in. Hans was there, down on one knee, his eyes wide, his muscles bulging. He had the super locked in a death hold, one arm around his throat, one across his thighs. He was bending the super backwards

across his knee, intent upon breaking his back.

It was a hold no normal creature, chem or otherwise, could have got on the super. Only monumental rage and hatred made it possible. The super was squawling like a tortured animal.

"Willie!" I yelled.

Willie had stopped at the door and was happily regarding the situation; a little enviously, too, I thought. But as I shouted, he sprang forward and lifted Hans up in the air by gripping his shoulders. He shook Hans as a bear would shake a rabbit and his grip on the super was broken. The super fell sobbing to the floor.

Hans twisted around, snarling. "Let go of me, you slob! I've got a right to kill him. It's not murder!"

Willie looked at me inquiringly. "What shall I do with him?"

I said, "It isn't a part of my plan to kill needlessly. One death too many may be the difference between success and failure."

Victor said, "Then we'd better lock him up."

"I'm afraid we'll have to."

Willie deposited Hans in another room and we threw the bolt. I went back and checked on the super. Other than a

badly wrenched back, he was unharmed except for the scare. He was getting a little courage back, because he said, "Have fun while you can, you lousy chem. My turn will come. And when it does, you'll wish you'd never been hatched."

I left him, glad that he could not see my face as I went out the door. It might have revealed the fact that I feared him right. If I carried my plan through, his day could very well come. I might be sending myself and the others right back into his loving arms.

As I walked down the corridor, I weakened. Was it worthwhile to carry through a plan that had one chance in ten of succeeding? No matter what the glittering reward of that one chance, had I the right to risk torture for the others, even if I were willing to risk it myself? And even the more so when we now had something to lose? Prior to this last break, we would have lost nothing. Now, we could leave this accursed system and find a haven for ourselves. Surely, in some system there would be no hatred for our kind.

I was wavering, and had about decided to give it up when I met Victor in the cor-

ridor. He must have sensed my indecision because he smiled and said, "I don't know what you have in mind, Arthur, and I'm not asking you to tell me. I'm only saying this: You have brought us this far. You have given us a moment of freedom, and for that, I turn my life over to you. If you carry us finally to destruction, we will still be ahead of the game. I am speaking only for myself, of course, but I know Willie would say the same, so it's a majority. Go on with whatever you have in mind."

"Thank you, Victor." And I went into the pilot room and began plotting the crazy course we would follow until we reached our objective or the ship ran out of fuel. . . .

Now, time had passed and certain things had been proven. No gunboat had come out of space to blast us down. This meant that they had either been unable to find us or that Critchfield had been touchy about asking for a gunboat to mend this nasty little rift in his fortunes.

I hoped it was the latter and this proved to be the truth when a police cruiser swung close to our orbit and stood off regarding us for a time. I held my breath, but after a

little while it went on about its business. No alarm had been given. I would have rejoiced if this had solved any but a comparatively minor problem of the moment. But it did not. It left our main hazard as precarious as ever and only permitted us to approach it.

A short time later, after many a dogged, stubborn circling of the ship, Victor came into the pilot room—where I was now spending most of my time—and said, "Those bodies in the hold—we've neglected to jettison them. Has that been an oversight on your part?"

I said, "No. Those bodies are very important to us. That is, I hope they will be."

"I see." He looked at the chart I had rigged and then turned to gaze out the port. "We're approaching Terra, aren't we?" he asked quietly.

This surprised me. I hadn't suspected him able to judge at this distance, even though it was not very far. "Yes."

"Perhaps you feel our best bet is landing there and losing ourselves in the slums of some city?"

"Would you be agreeable to that?"

He thought for a moment. "No. I can't say that I would."

"Nor would I. That is not my plan."

I felt his eyes on the back of my head. He said, "Don't you think it's about time to trust me with your plans, Arthur?"

It was my turn to think for a moment. "All right," I said. "I plan to set this ship down on Pennsylvania Avenue, as close to the World Federation capitol as I can."

I felt his surprise without turning to look at him. There was a pause before he asked, "What then?"

I turned and smiled, but without humor. "Then? Nothing, my friend. Nothing but hope."

He thought that over for a long time. "I think I see what you're driving at. You've no doubt thought it through, so it's probably useless to warn you of Critchfield's power; that his control of the Congress is tremendous; that it is practically a working dictatorship."

"I realize that."

"But you can still hope?"

"Yes—because there is something that even Critchfield fears—something that even dictators are afraid of."

Victor turned away sadly. "I pray that you are right, but I doubt it." With that he left the pilot room.

I was depending upon the

element of surprise to carry out a certain point. If this failed, we would not even find out if there was anything for us beyond our landing. I hoped that this old scow—obviously not a warship of any description—would cause hesitation on the part of patrol ships if they happened to be in the district. I thought this was not too much to hope for because there was no such thing as war-tension on Terra. A ship moving in bent on destruction was almost unthinkable. The Martian communities did not even have the word *war* or its equivalent in their language. The Venusians would perish any place but on their own planet. And the Terran nations were not nations at all and had not been for generations.

So perhaps we could get through.

The test came a few hours later when we arced in across the middle of the North American continent and slipped into a freight lane that ran from the west coast across the Rocky Mountains toward the eastern seaboard.

There, we were at least temporarily safe, even though a more disreputable looking scow had never before flown the lane. I waited momentarily for a hail from a traffic

station. None came until we crossed the Mississippi and were heading toward the Alleghany ridge. At this point a peremptory demand for identification came over the radio. I picked a reply out of the air as I revved up the tubes. "Atlas Shipping out of Tokio. Seven-Nine-Eleven-Five-Point Two."

The station would check the code book. That would take three or four minutes. I used those minutes to kite past slower traffic and curve off the lane. When the second challenge came, I tightened my fists on the controls and ignored it. They would need a little time. More, I hoped, than it would take me to get where I was going.

We made it. I circled tight on the gauge and went tail-down over my target, and after that, of course, there was nothing they could do. As our fins touched cement, I saw two patrol ships winging in from the south. But they were too late.

I ran from the control room and unlocked Hans's door. Willie and Victor hurried down the corridor to join us. "What about the super?" Victor asked.

"Leave him where he is." There was a little time and I used it to instruct Victor.

"You stay here by the hold control. When they open the port, we three will go out and down the ramp. Listen for my signal. When I call out, you dump the contents of the hold into the street. Have you got it?"

"Right."

The rest of us walked to the port, Willie leading the haggard, insane-eyed Hans by the arm. I could hear the shouting and the confusion from the outside. It seemed hours before the lugs were thrown and the port opened.

This was it. We walked out and down the ramp and stood there in the street.

From this point, I had no plan. All my efforts had been bent toward getting here. Now our fate was in the hands of God—if indeed, He cared about such as we.

A crowd was already gathering and I could see the look of horror on every face. It could have hardly been otherwise, because this was the capitol of the world and we had set down as close as possible to the fine, white building in which the President of the World lived. This was a place of grandeur—fine cars, shining streets, elegantly dressed people. Even the gutters were sanitary.

So, imagine the effect when a rotten garbage scow landed and three emaciated, ragged, filthy-dirty wrecks crawled out on pipe-stem legs and stood blinking at the sun.

The two policemen who had opened the port now found their tongues: "Who are you?"

"What kind of a joke is this?"

"It is no joke," I said.

"Does it look like one?" Willie asked.

"Then what are you doing here?"

"I've come to see my employer," I said.

"Who is he?"

"The Honorable Mr. Representative Critchfield."

"You're crazy!"

"Not I. Only one of us—poor Hans, here—lost his reason."

"Where in God's name are you from?"

"Mr. Critchfield's asteroid mines. I've brought something for him."

The policemen did not know quite what to do. They had never before been faced with anything like this. They could arrest us of course, but how did they go about arresting a garbage scow?

I was watching the crowd closely, and I saw several men standing nearby and writing

rapidly on pads they held in their hands. One of them put his pad away and pushed through toward the place we stood. "Kelly of the *Herald*," he said. "Tell me—is this a gag of some kind?"

"It is no gag."

"What's your name?"

"Arthur."

"Arthur what?"

"Just Arthur. I'm a chem. We chems are only allowed one name."

He seemed disappointed. "Oh, a chem, huh?" He looked up at the rocket. "Where was it you say you came from?"

"The asteroid mines owned by Critchfield," and I repeated the information I'd given the policemen.

They seemed to be waiting for something and now I discovered what it was. Someone had notified Critchfield and now he was approaching, striding along with a scowl on his face as the crowd washed back to let him pass. His eyes blazed as they picked me out. "Arthur! What insanity is this? What right have you to use my name?"

"I brought you something, sir."

"Of all the impudent—"

"I brought you these." I raised my voice. "All right, Victor!"

The port of the hold opened and the bodies of the dead chems came tumbling out into Pennsylvania Avenue. There was no sound for a moment except for the rattle of the falling corpses. Then a woman screamed. Another woman fainted and several men bent to her aid. Voices arose and the babble increased as people came running from every direction.

Critchfield's face was black with rage. "This is some sort of planned infamy!" he screamed.

"These bodies are from your asteroid mines," I said, yelling to make myself heard. "The workers you promised high wages and good treatment!"

"Lies! Lies! Some political enemy planned this."

A camera flashed nearby and Critchfield dived for it. "No pictures. No pictures!" he yelled. "It's nothing but a dirty plot!" He grabbed the newsman's camera and slammed it to the pavement.

"It is the truth!" I shouted.

There were a dozen policemen present, now, and Critchfield turned to them. "Arrest these criminals! Arrest them, I say! Take them to jail and see that no one talks to them. They are to be isolated!"

Victor had now come down

from the ship and the policemen laid hold of all of us and hustled us through the crowd. A few of the reporters tried to follow, but Critchfield held them back. "If you want the real story, you'll get it in my office within the hour," he said. "I'm calling a press conference. I'll reveal this outrage for the rotten plot it is—a plot to ruin my good name. But I know the people of this world—the good people who know me for what I am will not stand for this calumny. They will turn on these rascals and the brain behind them!"

Critchfield went on but his words faded as we were put into a police car and driven away. The last thing I saw was that the people listened respectfully. I remembered Victor's warning. He had told me Critchfield had power. Of course, I'd known it already, but still I thought of Victor's fateful words.

At the police station, we were not even booked. This was not exceptional, though. Chems often were deprived of the privilege. We were taken to a cell far downstairs—a special cell, it seemed to me; a place that would be hard to find.

The jailer could easily have been a guard in Critchfield's

mines. He regarded us with contempt and as he shoved us into our cell, he looked back toward the entrance to the block and said in a loud voice, "I'd hate to be in your shoes. I'd sure hate to get what Critchfield will be dishing out for you."

He left and we were alone. Hard bunks were furnished for our comfort and it occurred to me that they would probably have been taken away if the authorities had known how comfortable they really were. We were so weary we could have slept on a bed of nails.

After the far door closed, Victor laughed grimly. "Well, we've come a long way."

I said, "Yes, but it was no use. We might just as well have died on the asteroid. Critchfield's power is too great."

"You know why?—in this case?"

"Because he's—"

"Because people don't want to look at ugly truths. He'll black this affair out because they want him to. They just aren't interested in cruelty so long as they don't have to watch it."

"I knew that, but I hoped our appearance—dumping the bodies—"

"If the bodies could have

been glued down so they would have to look at them day after day, then they'd do something. But you can bet that Critchfield had the whole thing cleaned up in a matter of minutes."

The far door opened and the jailer reentered, pushing an evil-looking character along in front. They approached our cell and as the guard opened the cell door, the prisoner turned suddenly and lashed out at him. The guard yelled a curse and picked him up bodily and hurled him into our cell. . . .

An hour later, with the rest asleep, the new prisoner rolled over in his bunk and said, "You're the chems from Critchfield's asteroid mines, aren't you?"

I admitted it.

"You're really in a jam, friend."

"I would never have believed the police could be so heartless."

"That was the idea of your act, huh? To let the public know what was going on up there?"

"You've got it all figured out fine, mister."

"Well, Critchfield figures different. He's blacked this thing out so fast, the public will never know if he can help

it. That man's got power."

"Even with the press services?"

"With most of them. Tell me—exactly what did go on in the mines?"

I had nothing else to do, so I told him. The whole rotten story from the time I'd first heard Critchfield's plan to betray us when I was in his service. I talked on, but when I glanced over at the prisoner, he appeared to be asleep.

I stopped talking and a few minutes later, the guard came and took the man away. As he left, he winked at me. "I'm a tough character, friend. They can't keep me in long. I'll send you a cake with a saw in it."

A little while later they brought food and sometime after that, when the guard came to remove the dishes, he brought us a portable radio. As he left, he turned and winked at me.

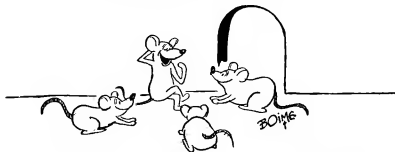
I sat for a long time won-

dering about that wink. Was he savoring the horror of the punishment Critchfield would mete out to us when we got back to the asteroid? There was no way of telling and after a while, with the others sitting in glum silence, I got up and plugged in the radio.

"They'll probably tell us all about the weather," Victor said grimly.

A newscaster said:

"—and so, as a result of our being able to smuggle a reporter into the cell of the maltreated chems—practically right under Representative Critchfield's nose—the whole appalling story has been revealed to the public. The story obtained from the prisoners, plus pictures taken at the scene of their setdown on Pennsylvania Avenue, is convincing beyond all shadow of a doubt. So convincing that even now a high-speed rocket is carrying Justice Depart-



"Then they ran me through some contraption called a maze."

ment officials to the asteroid mines held by Critchfield in the Scorpio sector off Neptune—"

Hans sat on his bunk staring straight ahead, not comprehending a word, but Victor and Willie hung over the radio with me, hardly breathing.

"—so the frantic efforts of Representative Critchfield to smother the news and subsequent investigation, were defeated by the courage of employees of Atlas News Service.

"Critchfield was taken into custody twenty minutes ago. He is being held on what one could later adjudge to be excessive bail, but in the meantime, without its leader, his machine is falling to pieces—a machine which subsequent investigation may reveal to be a criminal conspiracy. Perhaps the Representative's unspeakable mining activities may prove but a minor part of the trouble he faces—"

I heard a sound and looked up to see the guard watching through the bars. He grinned and pushed a pack of cigarettes within our reach. "Anybody for a smoke?" he said.

Before we could accept, the corridor outside was filled with people. In the forefront,

I saw the late prisoner to whom I had given our story. He said, "Unlock this damn door, Kennedy." He was speaking to the guard and he added, "By the way, I think you've already been promoted to head warden of this keep."

The guard's grin ran from ear to ear. "Will they put Critchfield in here?"

From that point on things became incoherent, as the people, eager to make up for their blindness, swung far in the other direction. I only remembered Victor leaning close to my ear as we rode away from the jail in a limousine. He said, "I—I can't believe it."

I smiled at him. "What do you think of the people now?"

"I was wrong—so very wrong."

"There will be new laws now. They never stop halfway. They may even—"

"Even what?"

"Allow us the status of human beings."

Victor was silent, the prospect of such a glorious thing choking up his throat, rendering him dazed and completely speechless.

And I was also speechless at the thought. I could only lift a prayer of thanksgiving—silently, in my heart.

THE END

BE MY GUEST!

By KARL STANLEY

Is your phone ringing? Okay, go ahead and answer it; but if the guy at the other end is someone who claims to be an old friend from out of town, think twice before you invite him over for dinner!

THE phone rang just as Ellen Fremly was putting the marble cake in the oven. She said, "Oh, damn it!" slammed the oven door shut and ran to the breakfast nook around the kitchen corner where the extension was.

The voice on the phone said, "Ellen? . . . Ellen? . . ."

Ellen Fremly said "Yes" a couple of times while she tried to think who the caller might be. This brassy voice. . . . Not one of her Larchmont friends, or even anyone she knew in Manhattan.

"Oh," said the voice. "I'm so glad I got you in. I *told* Ted that we should have *written* first. But you know Ted. 'You girls were *such* good friends,' Ted said. Isn't it the truth, Ellen?"

Ellen thought, this voice doesn't make sense. I might as well admit I don't know what she's talking about. "I'm

sorry," she said, "but I just can't place you. Yet the name Ted. . . ."

"I *am* silly," the voice said. "This is Nita. Nita *Gleeson*."

"Nita? Nita *Gleeson*? . . ."

The voice lost its exuberance, acquired a hurt tone: "Well, I *did* think after what you said in the wagons-lits when we stopped at that silly border station—Domodosolla, wasn't it?—on our way to Rome; well, I did think you *meant* it. . . ."

The scene, the words, the people, came to Ellen Fremly in a sudden picture of startling clarity. Nita Gleeson and her husband Ted. She—tall, gaunt, tweedy, horse-faced, pushing, with that braying brassy voice; he—a *pianissimo* imitation of his wife. Nita and she had been watching the shoving crowd around the screaming black market money changers. Nita had said,



One sudden twist—and he flew through the air!

"... and we'll be back in New York early in May. Wouldn't it be *too, too* fantastic if we didn't get together, just to talk over these silly things?..."

Ellen remembered quite well her reply: "But of course, Nita. Gordie and I'd be delighted to have you and Ted come out to see us."

And now they were here.

"Nita," Ellen's voice held just the right shade of contrition, "I'm *so* sorry. But my mind's nowhere. Just got back from some late shopping and was in the midst of getting dinner when..."

"I understand," Nita said. "But the moment we got into Grand Central I thought of those *wonderful* Fremlys and just had to call."

Oh, *damn* you! Ellen's thought was bitter. What a nice neat *dirty* spot you've put me on. I'm a heel if I don't invite you, and a fool if I do. Poor Gordie, he's going to be furious. Oh, well. Get it over. "Listen, Nita," she said hurriedly. "I want you and Ted to come out for dinner, tonight, right now! You won't be any trouble so don't say no. It's twenty of six and you can be out in forty minutes and Gordie can pick you up in the station in Larchmont. Understand?"

But Nita said no, emphatically and to the point. "Not for dinner, Ellen. Absolutely not! There's a nice restaurant in Grand Central and we'll eat right here. We'll take the eight-ten out."

Isn't that just like Nita Gleeson, Ellen thought, as she went back to the kitchen. Just take it for granted we'll be welcome, and learn the train schedule first.

Gorden Fremly said: "Woman, you've come a long way since your first cake." He speared a couple of loose crumbs between index finger and thumb. "It's baking like this makes a man give up the Automat."

"You almost didn't get cake," Ellen said while she poured coffee.

"Oh..."

"Yep. I got news for you, boy. Brace them shoulders, square that back, lift that pin-haid of yours. The Gleesons are coming."

Her words caught him with cup halfway to mouth. He took a slow swallow of the coffee, watching her over the lip of the cup. Then he put the cup gently into the saucer. "I thought you looked a little shook up," he said. "Old horsy and that trotting pony. They are coming here. When?"

"Tonight. On the eight-ten. And you did remember. He *did* remind you of a trotting pony, didn't he?"

"Uh-hunh. The only pony photographer I ever knew. They almost spoiled the cruise for me."

She said, "Weren't they the *pushingest* people?" Then, reflectively: "Yet they could be nice. Nosey as Nita was, I always had the feeling she'd ask those damn personal questions because she was really *interested* in you."

"There was another reason none of you women minded her around," Gordie said. "Alongside Nita Gleeson a plain woman became handsome and a pretty one, beautiful. The contrast. . . ."

Ellen began to collect the dishes. She stood beside him while she added his cup and saucer to the rest of the dishes. His eyes were turned up toward her, and his lips curled in a faint smile. She noticed the shadowing below the eyelids, and thought how each day they grew deeper and darker. In a sudden impulse she brought her head down and placed her lips against his. As his hands moved over her in a gentle caress she shook her head very slowly but without removing her lips. "Uh-unh. Got

to remember," she whispered against his mouth. "The Gleesons are coming."

He brought his teeth together in a gentle playful bite of her lower lip, and grinned at her startled movement away from him. "So let's not get any funny ideas," he said. "I'll help with the dishes and whatever else you want while we have time."

She stared at him with rounded eyes. "You bit my lip."

"And that won't be the only place," he warned. "Now let's to work, woman, else I put a point to that square head of yours."

She put the last of the silverware in the chest. Gorden Fremly leaned against the wall, smoking a cigarette. The smoke dribbled lazily upward from his nostrils. He was a heavy smoker but he did not inhale the smoke. She closed the silver chest, turned and gave him a quick bright smile.

"That's that. I straightened up before you got here," she announced. "The house is clean, and that's the important thing. Not that I give a hang what anyone thinks."

"Is that why you look for dust, wearing a pair of white gloves?" he asked.

"Can you think of a better way of finding it? You're going to wear the new charcoal-grey suit, aren't you, Gordie?"

He nodded.

"I like it," she said. "It gives you a kind of . . . executive look."

"As befits my station, hunh?"

"And why not? You *are* an executive."

"Administrator, pet. In the Atomic Commission we call ourselves administrators."

"You call it what you want, I'll call it what I want. Gordie Fremly, Executive. A right-fine sounding title. And that's enough talk. Me, too. You shower and change first 'cause you're the quickest."

"Yes, sir." He made a mock salute.

They held hands walking up the stairs together.

Later, he watched her apply lipstick in their bedroom. "I wonder," he said idly, "whether Ted is going to show up with his camera?"

She took a piece of Kleenex from a box on the vanity and placed it between her lips and squeezed them together to take off the excess lipstick. Her shoulders lifted slightly.

He laughed suddenly. She gave him a quick stare then

took the Kleenex from her lips and tossed it onto the dresser. He said, "I'll never forget the time he took Senator Hawkins' picture. Front view, profile, and every which way. And the old boy posing like it was a movie."

"You weren't exactly frowning when Ted took yours," she said.

"Honestly?"

"Yes . . . honestly."

"Guess we're all that way. Of course Ted had a sly tongue when he wanted to put it into use. That was an odd thing about him. Get him away from his wife and he's a changed man. I remember how surprised I was at his knowledge of nuclear physics. Not in an academic sense, understand, but in the way he grasped fundamentals. And he hit the Senator right on the nose when he said the man was a fool in every way except in his dedication to keep atomic energy out of the hands of private interests."

"You mean the Senator is a Mr. Big?" Ellen asked.

"The Mr. Big, in policy," he replied.

"Well. No wonder they used to chase after the Senator and his wife. I'd be a quivering frustrate after an afternoon with Nita. What a name-dropper that gal was. Sometimes I

wondered if they knew all those people they said they were going to visit on the continent."

"Your guess is as good as mine," he said. "But I will say they knew all the important people on board. Like that big French industrialist and Lord Ammerson, the English financier." He shrugged. "He even managed to get them to pose for him."

"Gordie, what time is it?"

He looked at his strap watch. "Damn! I'd better get going. The eight-ten's in any minute. . . ."

"What a cute *little* place," Nita Gleeson crowed.

"It's not exactly Grand Central," Ellen said.

"Of course not. But I like it, don't you, Ted?"

"Oh yes," he said. "Very much."

Ellen said: "Well, let's not stand in the doorway. Come in and I'll show you around. Gordie, maybe Ted'd like a drink."

Ted brought both hands shoulder high. "Not right now, please. Later, if you don't mind. H'mm. So this is the place you were telling me you were building? I didn't know whether you were in the Westchester book or not so I called Information."

Gordie thought: How bright of you. He said, "We were able to move right in after we got back from Europe." He took Ted's elbow and guided him after the women who were moving to the living room. "It's not quite finished," he continued. "There's a small area in the basement. . . ."

"Oh, yes," Ted said unexpectedly. "For your laboratory. I remember you mentioned it on board ship one time."

"I did, didn't I?" Gordie said. "Like to see it?"

"Of course," Ted said brightly.

The women excused them, and Gordie guided the other man to the basement stairs off the side door entrance. Gordie switched on the basement light. He led Ted past the automatic electric washer and dryer and around the gas furnace to an area about eight feet square from the far wall. It was the only place on the basement floor that wasn't concrete. The ground looked damp and black. Four sacks of cement leaned upright against the wall.

"Thought I'd save some money and do the cement work myself," Gordie said. "That is if I ever get the chance."

Ted said: "Interesting. Very. Well. . . ."

"Yeah. Might as well join the girls," Gordie said. And thought: What the hell do I say to this guy? What do we talk about? Photography, I suppose. "Still lugging that camera around, Ted?"

"Oh, my, Yes! I'm *lost* without it, you know."

They could hear Nita Gleeson's voice as they came into the kitchen.

"... and she couldn't speak a word of English. Not *one single word*. Just sat there smiling all the while we talked. Of course Chang has a simply *fabulous* command of the language. Just *fabulous*. . . ." The women looked up as the men entered.

Ellen said: "Nita was just telling me of their visit to China. They spent a whole day with the Premier and his wife. . . ."

"With Mr. Hsiang?" Gordie said.

"Such *delightful* people," Nita Gleeson said. "She was about so high." She measured a distance with her hands approximately four feet tall. "Like a *doll*. And she was so cute when Ted took their pictures. We're going back in the fall. We *promised*. We're also going back to see Mr. Ma-

lenin, the Soviet Premier and Tadashi Hamonito the Japanese industrialist."

"Gordie," Ellen said, "I swear these people have been everywhere and seen everything." Her eyes looked a little weary. Suddenly she smiled. "Anyone for a drink?"

"Just a *wee, wee* one," Nita said. "Brandy, please."

"Ted? . . ." Gordie asked as he started for the portable bar.

"Nothing, thanks," Ted said.

Nita burst into sudden laughter while she was sipping her drink. They looked questioningly at her. She swallowed the rest of the drink, and said: "Ted learned judo in Japan. I had to laugh thinking of the time he showed off at the Count Fermizzi's in Rome. We had been there the year before and came back for a visit. Ted, show Gordie what you did."

"Now, Nita. . . ." Ted said.

"Oh, they won't mind."

"But Nita," Ellen started to object.

Nita Gleeson patted Ellen's hand. "Don't *worry*," she said. "There is absolutely *nothing* to it. *Believe* me. Go ahead, Ted."

The men were standing to one side of the long and nar-

row cocktail table. Gorden Fremly frowned and said, "I don't think this is the place for it, Ted. Another time, maybe."

"Oh, anyplace will do," Ted said lightly. He smiled up at the taller man, then moved with sudden and surprising speed. He grasped the other's arms and maneuvered Fremly around so they were back to back, then, without pause he bent forward swiftly, and Gorden Fremly's body described an arc and came down with tremendous force, his legs from the knees down crashing across the cocktail table.

There was the loud crash of the fall, a sharper more brittle sound as both of Gorden Fremly's legs snapped just below the knees, and an animal-like scream torn from his throat before shock made him faint.

Ellen passed her hand over her forehead. She couldn't take her eyes from the unconscious body of her husband. He was lying face upward, the eyes closed, the circles like black smudges under the closed lids. There was a faint film of perspiration on the greyish skin. She let her eyes move slowly down to where the legs stretched gro-

tesquely at right angles to each other. A jagged chunk of white bone came up through each pant leg. The area around the bone was stained crimson. The white bone looked exactly like sun-bleached driftwood she'd once seen in the Arizona desert.

Ellen suddenly wished that woman would stop screaming. It was a tormenting sound. . . .

"Nita," Ted said, "can't you do something about Ellen's screaming? Poor woman's hysterical."

"Poor, *poor* Ellen," Nita said comfortingly. She placed her arms around Ellen.

Ellen shook her head. But the horror refused to leave. "Get out! Get out both of you! Get out . . . Oh. Oh, Gordie—"

"Now Ellen," Nita Gleeson said. "Don't you worry about a thing. Ted and I will take care of everything. Won't we Ted?"

The little man looked down at Gorden Fremly. There was nothing but blank indifference on Ted Gleeson's face. He turned his eyes upward toward his wife. "Please do something about Ellen," he said.

Nita Gleeson put her right hand around Ellen's throat. Her fingers reached almost completely about the slender neck. They closed suddenly

and quickly, thumb and middle finger squeezing at certain nerves. Ellen Fremly remained sitting when the other woman removed her fingers but she sat as one transfixed. Only her eyes moving in horror showed she was alive.

Nita shoved her back against the couch, arose and went to stand beside her husband.

"I think I had better fetch our friends," Ted Gleeson said. "I'll use the Fremly car." He bent and pressed nerves at the side of Gorden Fremly's throat. "Don't want him screaming when he comes to. Be back shortly."

The door opened and Ted Gleeson came through. He turned and said, "Come in. Come in, please." Ellen and Gorden Fremly came into the room. A man and woman duplicating in every physical feature the true Fremly's.

Ted Gleeson looked at his strap watch. He pursed his lips, nodded, then said: "The new Mr. Fremly and I have some work to do downstairs. Why don't you and this one watch television till we're through?"

"A splendid idea. Come, my dear," Nita said. "Might as

well get used to things around the place."

"That's right," Ted said. "We've got to get back to Manhattan. Got to replace Senator Hawkins tomorrow. There's more than one way to conquer a planet, you know." He turned to the figure beside him. "Help me carry these two down to the room in the basement."

Two hours later Ted Gleeson and the other man came upstairs. There were streaks of grey dust on their clothes. Ted Gleeson smiled at his wife. "Now let's not wear out our welcome," he said. "After all. . . ."

"We were watching Steve Allen," Nita said. "He is the *funniest* man, isn't he, dear?"

The android Mrs. Fremly nodded.

Ted said, "Gordie drive us to the station."

The android said, "Excuse me," as they got to the door. He let Ted Gleeson and his wife through, then turned to the android in the hall and gave her a quick kiss. "Don't wait up," he whispered. "I'll close up when I get back."

She said, "Isn't that damn Nita Gleeson the *pushingest* woman?" and closed the door after him.

THE END

version in whatever media was open to him. At the moment neither side has backed down—and probably never will.

Amazing Stories was represented in the anthology—but not by the selection we originally made. We had picked a short story, "If This Be Utopia" by Kris Neville, from the May, 1950, issue. Moskowitz telephoned us, said he liked our choice, but that (and this is from memory) he would like very much to substitute Otto Binder's "I—Robot," as it fitted in better with what he hoped to accomplish with the book. Our feelings weren't wounded—no screams of "professional integrity" from us—for certainly "I—Robot" was more than worthy of appearing in *any* anthology. Besides, we understood pretty well the extent of Sam's problem.

● As to the author mentioned in our first paragraph, his name is Isaac Asimov—a clean-necked personable young man who resembles the standard conception of a truck driver. Isaac is more than normally literate, holds university degrees and is as nice a guy as you'd want to know. In addition he writes science-fiction novels, most of them published by Doubleday—a house not given to printing anything but the best. Personally, we find his books to be well-written, exciting and uncommonly ingenious—far more so, frankly, than a lot of other so-called "masterpieces" in the s-f field.

Like most hard-working men who take their craft seriously, Isaac is sensitive to criticism—particularly when it appears to border on a personal attack—and when in recent months a reviewer for one of the prozines stated time and again something to the effect that Asimov couldn't even write his own name unless somebody guided his hand . . . well, Isaac understandably blew up. His remarks appeared in a fanzine, whereupon the reviewer's editor ran a column telling Asimov if he couldn't stand honest and dispassionate criticism, he'd be better off composing recipes for clam chowder.

Actually, Isaac would have been better off to ignore the whole thing. A realistic-minded writer seeks to satisfy himself, his editor and his reader—in that order. As for the reviewers, their opinions do little to sell books—or for that matter to hinder their sale.—HB



The earth opened and the city fell apart amid the screams of the dying.

BUT THE PLANET DIED

By C. H. THAMES

You don't know this Douglas Crawford and you never will, for he lived three hundred million years ago. Yet he worked as a technician out at Brookhaven Laboratory in New York — and could be there today if a long-dead planet hadn't yelled for help!

FROM the January 1956
issue of SCIENCE
MONTHLY

Field workers from New York's Hayden Planetarium have already recovered sixty-five tons of meteoric stone and nickel-iron from the great meteor fall of last

November. Since fossilized plant-life was discovered in several of the meteoric fragments, the November fall is a historic occasion for astronomers, proving, as it does, that the origin of the solar system's meteor swarms, like the origin of its asteroids, is a planet



which some hundreds of millions of years ago, circled the sun in an orbit between Mars and Jupiter. Most startling of all is the evidence of the fossil formations in some of the meteorites: planet five, which was torn asunder by the greatest explosion in the history of the solar system some hundreds of millions of years ago was, like Earth, the abode of life.

According to Dr. Clyde Ewart, director of the Hayden Planetarium, the November fall was the greatest meteoric bonanza on record, surpassing even the Siberian fall earlier this century. "We are indeed fortunate," said Dr. Ewart, "that the fall occurred over the sparsely inhabited dune region of eastern Long Island, for it would have done untold damage over a more heavily populated area."

The only known casualty of the fall was a Mr. Douglas Crawford, a technician at the Brookhaven National Laboratory. Although the wreck of his car was found near the center of the fall, Mr. Crawford's body has not yet been recovered.

But Douglas Crawford, who witnessed the meteor fall from ground zero, did not die. This is his story—and yours:

"JUST keep your eyes straight ahead and your hands on the steering wheel, pal, and you won't get hurt," the rasping voice ordered.

Doug had been doing just that since picking up the hitch-hiker on Sunrise Highway. You don't fool around with a man who sits at the other end of the front seat of the car, staring at you over the muzzle of a .45 automatic. Maybe you regret the fact that you picked him up, maybe you vow never to pick up a hitch-hiker again, especially not at night, especially not when you just heard over the car radio that Lucky Caretti, the nation's number one gang boss who was about to be deported from New York, had escaped his guards and was last seen heading for Long Island.

"You're Caretti, aren't you?" Doug said.

"Just shut up and keep driving."

"Where do you want me to go?"

"You're doing fine so far. I'll tell you."

Doing fine meant driving steadily eastward along Sunrise Highway. Did Caretti have a private boat waiting for him at Montauk Point on

the eastern end of the Island? Was he going to be deported his own way, to appear again where he wanted and when he wanted? The questions were merely rhetorical, Doug thought bleakly. For, well aware of Caretti's record, he didn't think he would be around to learn any of the answers.

Until, at precisely 2 A. M., the sky suddenly caught fire.

"What the hell is that?" Caretti roared.

Doug applied the brakes. The old Plymouth lurched to a stop. It was as if sheets of molten fire had suddenly come scalding out of the dark, moonless sky.

"Aurora?" Caretti suggested, displaying a knowledge which surprised Doug.

But it wasn't the aurora. It was too bright and too close. And the sounds of hundreds of explosions, trip-hammer-quick, punctured the darkness. Doug got out of the car and Caretti did not stop him. Caretti climbed out after him, gazing up at the fireworks. The sheets of fire had given way to long swift streamers which flung themselves across the sky. The explosions grew louder. The streamers became great fireballs, hissing and thundering in from the east.

"Some kind of atomic fire-

works from over at Brookhaven?" Caretti said.

Doug shook his head. "That's where I work, Brookhaven. I would have heard about it."

"Then what the hell is it?"

Doug shrugged.

"All right, pal. We'll sit it out. Just stay where I can see you. Don't try anything."

Some of the fireballs began to land, hitting the ground with explosive force and scattering sparks and fragments. The steady, booming explosions were closer now, deafening.

"Run, for Chrissake!" Caretti suddenly roared.

Doug looked up. A large, blue-glowing fireball seemed to float at them, suspended almost serenely on the night sky. But it grew larger, hissing and smouldering—and heading straight for the car.

Caretti started to run, with Doug on his heels. The hissing grew louder, drove all other sound from Doug's ears. Once Doug looked back and saw the swollen fireball, as big as the car, hanging over it. He barely had time to plunge head-first into a ditch beyond the shoulder of the road. He was aware of Caretti falling heavily beside him, cursing. Then the sky came down and slammed against the back of

his head. His last thought was that Caretti probably wished he'd remained with the immigration officials in New York.

Douglas Crawford spent the next six months in a drugged, dream-like state. He was badly injured, he could sense that. His body was impossibly broken. By rights, he should have been dead. Once, he caught a reflection of himself in something shining and the image, which was not clear, was of a broken, twisted man suspended in a vat of transparent, blue-tinted liquid. He did not look for his reflection again. Once he bumped against something floating in the vat and he thought he saw Caretti there, suspended next to him. Caretti looked even worse than he did.

But slowly, Doug was aware of healing. He felt stronger. He remained conscious and aware of his environment for longer stretches of time. Several times he was taken from the tank of liquid but immediately drugged so that he remembered nothing.

And one day, when he awoke, the vat was gone. He found himself in a small room with two cots and four featureless gray walls. And Caretti.

"About time you woke up,

September Morn," Caretti chuckled.

Caretti was naked. He seemed in one piece, unscarred. Doug felt well-rested. He wasn't wearing any clothing either, but the room was warm. He stood up and tested the muscles of his legs gingerly. His steps were weak and uncertain, but his legs felt sound. He grinned at Caretti because he felt surprised—and glad—to be alive.

Caretti frowned. "Hospital?" he said.

Doug shrugged. "I guess so."

"All that artillery just to catch me," Caretti said. "I ought to be flattered."

"You're not serious, are you?"

"Nope. It wasn't artillery. But what the hell do you think it was?"

"Meteors," said Doug. "At least, that's what I think. It couldn't have been anything else, could it?"

"Meteors." Caretti flavored the word. "We'll see."

"Anyway, we ought to be glad we're alive."

Caretti looked at him strangely. "Say that again."

"I said, we ought to be glad—"

"There, that's it! What the hell language are we talking? I can understand it like I been

speaking it all my life, but listen to it, will you?"

It was a strange language all right, Doug decided. Yet he spoke it perfectly and so did Caretti. And both of them understood it. Impossible? thought Doug. They were alive, weren't they? Plastic surgery—or something—had repaired their bodies incredibly. And their minds?

"It ain't Italian," said Caretti. "I happen to know Italian."

It didn't sound like any language Doug could think of. It was completely alien. Doug was about to tell this to Caretti when a door in one of the blank walls suddenly opened.

The wall, like all the others, had been featureless. The door appeared abruptly, like a shuttering camera lens. It closed just as quickly. The wall was again featureless.

A woman was in the room with them.

"For crying out loud!" Caretti bleated, trying unsuccessfully to cover his nakedness.

The young woman smiled, tossed each of them a robe indifferently and said, "Welcome to Karia."

"Where," said Caretti, climbing into his robe, "the hell is Karia?"

Doug was staring at the woman. She was young, he decided, in her early twenties. She was tall, almost as tall as Doug himself. She wore her blonde hair long and straight, hanging below her shoulders. She wore a tunic which was draped over the curves of her body and which rustled metallically as she walked toward them. She was very pretty.

"I don't have much time," the girl said eagerly. "I can't explain now. But tell me, is either one of you familiar with aeronautical engineering?"

"I'm a technician at Brookhaven," Doug said.

"The place name is meaningless here. It will not be spoken for another three hundred million years, and it will not be spoken here at all."

That made perfect sense to her. It sounded like gibberish to Doug. "I'm a technician, not an engineer," Doug finally said. "But the answer to your question is yes. I am."

The girl smiled at him. She had a very expressive face and she was ready either to cry or to smile, awaiting his words. She said, "Then perhaps it isn't too late. Whatever happens, don't forget this. They may ask you questions. They may test you in

various ways. They may try to browbeat you. Whatever happens, tell them Jaris is your spokesman. Tell them you came here to help Jaris. If they ask you how you came, refuse to answer."

"That's easy," Doug grinned, "because we don't know."

"Remember, Jaris is your spokesman." She turned to go.

"What's in it for us?" Caretti asked.

"Profit? Do you mean profit?"

"Sure, you know. Profit. What makes the world go 'round."

"You are here to save whatever Karians can still be saved because we are too foolish to save ourselves. Isn't that enough?"

"I only want to know what's going on and what's in it for us," Caretti persisted in an injured tone.

"Later," she promised. "I'll tell you later. They'll be coming soon. Don't forget. The name is Jaris."

"Your name?" Doug asked.

"Yes, my name. Jaris."

The door shuttered open. She went through it. The wall was featureless.

"I'll be damned," Caretti said.

When the door shuttered

open again moments later, they forgot all about Jaris.

II

"GET on your feet," someone ordered.

"Who gave you those robes?"

"Who visited you against regulations?"

"Is this a trick of the Exodus Party? Are you really from space?"

Half a dozen men filled the small room, shooting questions at them. Caretti looked bewildered. He had probably looked that way all through the trial which resulted in orders for his deportation. It was a pose. He would maintain it, Doug thought, and find out "what was in it for him." It was a very successful pose and it gave the play entirely to Doug.

"Answer us. Can't you speak?"

"I told you, Lamicus. They're not from space. It's a trick of the Exodus Party. We're wasting our time here."

The middle-aged man named Lamicus frowned. "I don't know," he said. "I thought it was conclusively proven while their bodies were being rebuilt that they were not Karians."

The other man smirked.

"Slight differences, if any. Our biologists said, for example, that cross-mating was quite possible. I tell you, Lamicus—"

"Hold. Let them answer our questions. Where are you from?" he asked, turning to Doug and Caretti.

"Brookhaven," Doug said. The word was apparently untranslatable, for it came out in English.

"A larger designation, please," said Lamicus.

"Long Island." English.

"Larger."

"The United States." Again, English.

"Still larger, I'm afraid." Lamicus looked interested. The other five men looked suspicious.

Doug took a deep breath. "The planet Earth," he said. He did some frowning himself now. It did not come out as Earth. It came out as the new language equivalent of Earth.

"Third from the sun," Lamicus mused. "Does that satisfy you, Propus?" he asked one of the other men.

Propus, who was young enough to be Lamicus' son, shook his head. "No. Why should it? Anybody can *say* he's from the third planet from the sun."

"You mean this isn't Earth?" Doug wanted to

know. The impossible meteor fall, the strange things done to their ruined bodies, the new language, all pointed in that direction.

"You are on the fifth planet," said Lamicus.

The fifth planet. Jupiter. "Now, wait a minute," Doug said. "I happen to know something about astronomy. Jupiter's so big and the pull of gravity so strong, we'd hardly be able to stand here. How can this be Jupiter?"

Lamicus smiled grimly. "I wish it was Jupiter," he said. "For Jupiter is not going to explode. This is the planet whose orbit lies between those of Mars and Jupiter."

"But no planet—" Doug's voice trailed off. There had been a planet there, far back in the long silent eons of pre-history. The asteroids were mute testimony to this. The asteroids—all that remained of a shattered planet—circled the sun in orbits which generally clung to that region of space between Mars and Jupiter.

"Then you know?" asked Lamicus. "For I see it in your face. There is some proof in your own age that once a planet circled the sun here, where now Karia moves?"

"Yes," said Doug.

"Tell me!" The man's lined

face was almost ashen with expectancy and dread.

"Fragments of a planet," Doug said. "Some of them are a few hundred miles in diameter. Some are no bigger than pinheads. Millions and millions of them."

"Then Karia *will* explode!" Lamicus said. There was both triumph and despair in his voice.

"Don't tell me you believe him?" Propus sneered. "Patently, it's some trickery of the Exodus Party. I say we ought to expose these two imposters, Lamicus."

"Expose them, when they can possibly save some fragment of our civilization? Expose them, when there's a chance they are telling the truth? That would be a foolish risk to take, Propus. Of course, the six of us are here to vote on this very thing."

Propus nodded eagerly. He was a tall, well-muscled young man with an arrogant face. "The Exodus Party is illegal, Lamicus. You know that, and yet sometimes in your speeches at the Legislature you defend them."

"My own daughter—" began Lamicus.

"And *my* fiancée. These are troubled times, Lamicus. I'm sure Jaris will see the errors

of her way, but these charlatans—"

"I don't know if I believe them or not," Lamicus admitted. "I want to believe them, for there is so much at stake."

"At stake?" Propus sneered again. "Only if you believe fairy stories, Lamicus. Because a few earthquakes, a few volcanoes—"

"A few!" Lamicus cried. "Matrik City is in ruins, with two million dead. The island of Konchis sinks under the waves. The oceans broil with subterranean explosions. The coasts are flooded. The geologists tell us—"

"Geology," scoffed Propus. "You call that a science? The only true sciences are the biological sciences. If you will let your decision in this matter rest on pseudo-science and the word of these charlatans and yes, even on the fancied melodramatic notions of your own daughter, my betrothed—"

"That's enough," Lamicus said. "We will vote."

"It doesn't matter what you vote," Doug said, remembering what the girl had told him. "We're here to help Jaris. Jaris is our spokesman." It was a bold step to take, but whatever happened here, he did not want to be pushed around. "The outcome

of your voting couldn't possibly interest us."

Caretti had taken in this interchange with complete silence. But now he smiled for the first time. He winked at Doug. Probably, Doug thought, he approves of my boldness. He doesn't know what's going on any more than I do, but that much he can understand. He approves of it.

"Insufferable arrogance," Propus said haughtily. "You know what *my* vote is."

Lamicus nodded. "You make enough noise so we are sure to know it. I vote that we give these men a chance."

"And your daughter's Exodus Party too?" Propus demanded.

"Yes, the Exodus Party, too. We ought to legalize it."

When the others had had their say, the vote was five to one against Lamicus. "Record it," said Propus to one of the other men, who plucked a notebook from the belt of his tunic.

Lamicus shook his head sadly, looking helplessly at Doug. "I'm truly sorry, Earthman," he said. "This means indefinite confinement for you, until it has been decided what to do about the Exodus Party. I fear by then it would be too late for all of us."

"Confinement?" Caretti cried. "You mean prison? Hey, wait a minute."

"Then you're ready to confess and tell us what you know?" Propus asked him eagerly.

"I'm ready to do anything which'll keep me out of prison. I had enough of prison."

"You see?" Propus said. "You see the sort of men who are recruited by the Exodus Party. Veterans of prisons."

"You just go ahead and ask me anything," Caretti suggested. He winked at Doug again. The wink said: what I don't know, I'll invent. No more prison for Caretti, wherever the hell we are.

"Shut up, Caretti," Doug said.

"Listen, pal," Caretti bristled. "You save your own skin whatever way you want. Let me worry about Caretti."

Doug took a menacing step toward him. He hardly knew why. But there was something in Lamicus' grim earnestness which had got across to him. And more than that, something about the girl. About Jaris.

"I'm warning you, pal," Caretti said.

"I don't think you ought to tell lies to save your own skin, that's all."

"Lies?" mimed Caretti, his face indignant. "Lies? Me, tell lies? I only want to tell these gentlemen whatever truth they want to know."

"You come outside with me, friend," said Propus, "and we'll have a long talk."

Caretti nodded, moved with Propus toward the blank wall which would soon shutter into a door to permit their exit from the small room.

Just then the room rocked.

The floor tilted crazily, hurling Doug against one of Propus' companions. The man yelled something Doug didn't hear, but then the floor rocked again, convulsively this time. The shuttering door opened violently. Propus and Caretti were standing to one side of it. Lamicus had been flung down on one of the cots. The world spun and dipped and whirled.

"Another earthquake," Lamicus groaned.

There were three of Lamicus, all dancing wildly. Three of everything, jerking up and down. Outside and far away, Doug heard distant booming sounds. The shuttering door flapped open and shut like a pair of giant jaws. Propus staggered away from it with Caretti, back into the room, which was still rocking and swaying.

Why not? thought Doug. If he remained here and they survived the earthquake, it meant prison. Indefinitely. Now, in the confusion, he might have a chance to escape. He didn't know where he would go, but he could worry about that later. Now—and only now—he would have a chance to get away. He spoke the Karian language perfectly. He looked so much like a Karian that Propus and all of the others except Lamicus had deluded themselves into believing he *was* a Karian. Even Lamicus wasn't sure.

Doug waited until for one brief moment he had steadied himself in the heaving room, then rushed toward the door. The great shutters were still flapping up and down. If he timed it wrong, he could be cut in half—

Propus realized what he was attempting at the last moment. Propus came toward him on unsteady feet, shouting, lunging at him with outstretched arms. Doug moved inside the powerful arms and brought his right fist up swiftly, decisively, feeling the numbness to his elbow as the knuckles struck Propus' jaw. The Karian sagged and fell away from him.

Panting, Doug stood there.

He was trying to time the cadence of the shuttering door. A mistake would mean death, and yet it was almost impossible to find the rhythm of the door because the floor still shook and rocked and heaved. Intervals of about two seconds, Doug thought. Two and a fraction, perhaps. Steady intervals. He timed them. "One thousand one," he said. "One thousand two—" Slam! Together came the giant shutters, and apart once more.

"You fool!" he heard Carretti call to him. "You'll never—"

And then he was plunging through. He heard the clanging snap of the shutters behind him, scrambled to his feet. He looked back and was almost sick. One of the Karians had tried to stop him, had plunged through after him. The man was stuck there, halfway out. He remained that way, draped over the lower shutter, when the door banged open again. He was cut almost in half.

Now Doug was in a gray-walled corridor, running, slammed from wall to wall as the floor jarred him and made it all but impossible for him to keep his feet. He followed the corridor to another

one of the shuttering doors, which had been jarred permanently open by the earthquake shocks. He leaped through and was outside in the open air.

A heavy pall of dust and smoke blinded him, choked him. Through the haze he could see people running, running, running everywhere. Or falling, climbing to their feet again, unsteadily, looking about themselves fearfully, trying to get away from the buildings of the city. There must be a park somewhere nearby, Doug thought. They're all running in one direction, as if they know where they're going. The park and its open spaces meant life. Here in the city was only death.

For the great buildings, tall, graceful, their spires piercing the gloom of the smoke pall, were falling.

An enormous golden dome rocked and teetered far above Doug's head. It seemed to hang there, as if it couldn't make up its mind. Then it began to fall. He heard screaming, saw forms stumbling toward him. The dome crashed down, hit earth with a thud. Doug ran on, pelted by falling masonry, shards of glass, stone and other debris. Walls collapsed outward on

all sides of him, shuddering in the death-throes of the city and then abruptly falling apart and tumbling down in pieces, in boulders, in rubble.

And there was fire. Fire everywhere, licking orange tongues of it, caressing the city with hot, deadly embraces. "The park!" someone roared near Doug. "I can't see! The park—" His voice faded, was lost.

Doug plunged on. The robe Jaris had given him was ripped to shreds. What remained of it hindered his flight. He stripped it off and ran naked through the dense smoke. Once he saw a small child sitting helplessly at the base of a high wall. He turned his stumbling steps in that direction, but before the child could be reached, the wall collapsed on it.

Wailing and screaming and madness. Doug heard shouts of "Exodus Party!" on all sides of him. Some of them, fantastically, said this was a trick of the Exodus Party. Others said the Exodus Party was right, this was Judgment Day, the world was falling apart. The phrases came to him in eerie, disembodied snatches. They made no sense. Later he could wonder about them, try to make something of all he heard, try to under-

stand. Now he was fleeing for his life.

All at once, he knew he had reached the park. The smoke was now too dense to see the trees distinctly, or the lack of man-made structures. But here the people huddled together fearfully, and they were no longer running. Doug found himself wading through a stream, its cool waters reaching to his knees. On either bank the people were crowding, huddling together, talking in whispers, hardly daring to raise their voices for fear the sound would bring down some new destruction on them.

"Help!" someone cried. "Help . . . the bleeding, I can't stop it. . . ."

And Doug found himself helping the man, whose face was all but obscured by the smoke. With strong fingers he ripped away part of the man's tunic, used it to stop the flow of blood. He did not wait for thanks. His limbs were still sound. With others, he found himself moving from group to group, helping the injured, comforting them. Almost, he forgot that this was some distant planet and he was a fugitive who would forfeit his freedom if he were found.

He worked among the in-

jured, not speaking, not pausing for thanks, until he dropped wearily to his knees. And by then the ground tremors had stopped. Soon afterwards, disaster squads came around with small pastries and a hot drink which tasted like chocolate. An elderly woman in one of the disaster squads assessed Doug's most immediate need, smiled at some secret joke and soon returned to him with a threadbare but serviceable tunic and trousers. He dressed quickly and now was too spent to aid further in the rescue operations. He leaned back against a tree trunk on the bank of the stream and listened to the conversation about him, chaotic, heard in snatches and people drifted from place to place in the park.

"End of an era . . . the city . . . the beautiful city . . . ruined."

"If only we could rebuild—but it is forbidden."

"Rebuild? Careful, friend . . . treason!"

Why on Earth—or rather, on Karia—Doug wondered, would it be considered treason to rebuild? Now, as he recalled it, the city had indeed seemed old, each structure weather-worn and in need of repairs, which for some reason could not be made.

The thick pall of smoke still turned daylight to dusk, but it was growing lighter. Doug knew his face would not be remembered under the circumstances and said to the man nearest him, "Why can't you rebuild?"

"Why? Everyone knows why. It is forbidden."

"But why is it forbidden?"

"Don't stir up trouble, friend."

"I'm not. I only want to know."

"You don't know? Where on Karia did you come from?"

Doug mumbled a meaningless answer and waited, hoping the man would tell him.

"You must be joking. Everyone knows that since the last war the physical sciences are all but forbidden us. It's the right way, is it not? We should not work with the tools which could cause our destruction."

Fools, Doug thought. Fools. Here, with a great city in ruins, they could do nothing about it. And worse—for suddenly he remembered the girl Jaris' words. She had asked if he was familiar with aeronautical engineering. Why? The answer was simple. Her Exodus Party had delved into the forbidden physical sciences and had come up with a terrible answer to the

tremendous volcanic activity. Karia, the fifth planet, was in its death throes. It was going to be destroyed. Aeronautical engineering? Not quite. *Astronautical* engineering—space flight to save those who could be saved. And a planet-wide injunction against the physical sciences. . . .

Doug began to prow! about the park restlessly. If the Exodus Party had delved into the theoretical aspects of space travel, then he could help them. The theory he did not know, but he was capable of executing it. He'd be helping the Karians, and since they were human beings that was important. He'd be helping Jaris. He did not yet know how important that was to him. And he'd also be saving his own life, for if Karia was to be blown to fragments in the near future, and there was no way he could leave. . . . But how the devil, he thought, had he come here in the first place? A meteor fall on Earth, a bursting fireball, blackness and—Karia.

He walked to the very edge of the park, gazed out on the ruined city. Distantly, great flames licked into the air, funeral pyre of a dying city. There were shouts and moans of pain and grief on all sides.

Suddenly, he was aware of a group of figures running toward the park.

"There he is!" someone cried.

Doug recognized the arrogant voice of Propus. A whistle shrilled.

Instead of ducking back into the park, Doug sprinted along its edge and then cut back into the city on a narrow street. Here rubble was piled high and in the dimness, the way was treacherous, but he would stand a better chance of getting away from Propus and his men. Once he looked back and could see them following him. After that, it wasn't necessary. He could hear them. His legs were still unsteady. Unless he found some place to hide, they would be on him in moments.

A damaged building loomed up on his left, its opened shuttering doorway beckoning. He looked back once again, aware that a great pile of rubble in the street behind him momentarily hid his pursuers from sight. Then he plunged inside the building.

He was immediately confronted by a flight of stairs. He climbed them to a landing, where a window fronted on the street. He looked outside and saw Propus and the others dog-trotting out of sight.

His smile was tired but triumphant.

And then a voice said, "Who are you?"

"I—I confess I'm lost," Doug said, unable to see the woman who had spoken. From her voice he judged that she was old. "The earthquake, the confusion," he added lamely, hoping he sounded bewildered enough. "I don't know which quarter of the city—"

"I'll bet you're hungry," the hag cackled.

Doug said that he was.

"Well, then, come with me. It's the least a body can do."

He heard footsteps ascending the stairs. He followed them. From above, a piercing scream tore apart the darkness.

III

"WHAT'S the matter up there?" Doug called.

The hag cackled again. "Matter? Who said anything was the matter? Come along, dearie."

"That screaming—"

There was another scream. A different voice this time. Deeper.

"Oh, *that*," the hag said. "We have a Crack of Doom preacher visiting with us tonight. End of the world and all that silliness. You know.

He's sending a few of my neighbors into ecstasy."

If ecstasy and screaming were synonymous, he was sending them all right, Doug thought. He climbed the stairs and suddenly came out of the darkness into a brightly lit hallway. He could hear the sound of a voice now, deep, sonorous, like the clamor of a brazen bell.

"Brethren," intoned the voice. "We are gone. We are finished. We are witnessing the last days of Karia. The Earth god and the sky god do battle over our planet, and think you the Earth god will win?"

"Yes!" a shrill voice exclaimed. "Muldun the Earth god will tear us asunder."

"In that," the brazen bell voice said, "you are wrong. For in the end Fermaque the sky god will receive what is left of our destroyed planet. The Earth god thunders, but Fermaque will win." The voice was spell-binding, hypnotic. "Fermaque will be our crypt for all eternity, unless—"

Someone else screamed. It was almost like a seance, Doug thought. He could see the hag clearly now, outlined against the light, her seamed face bisected by a smile which gave her the appear-

ance of an ancient, withered frog.

"Unless what, Brother Kassandine?" the hag demanded from the hallway.

"Unless," said Kassandine, for such was the preacher's name, "we agree at once to an alliance with Fermaque, the sky god. Do you not think it possible, brethren? For I tell you it is. We only need to forsake the earth which gave us birth and embrace the sky which awaits us—either as a crypt or as a place of salvation. The choice, in these last days of Karia, is ours."

Doug was amazed. A preacher? Not really. What he was saying was thinly veiled. Unless Doug was very much mistaken, this preacher, this Kassandine, belonged to the Exodus Party. He was getting them ready for the inevitable with religious fervor—and telling them salvation lay in their own hands. They could wait for doom—or they could embrace their sky god. Under the circumstances, embracing the sky god clearly meant space travel.

"We have a hungry wayfarer with us," the hag said, entering the large room with Doug.

He looked around. A score

of people sat on the floor, listening to the preacher Kassandine. Their rapt eyes were intent upon him, and with one swift glance Doug could see why. This Kassandine was a giant of a man, tall and thin but with enormously broad shoulders. He had a long dark arrogant face and his eyes were smouldering coals under the craggy brow, above the gaunt cheeks. The voice, the wonderful voice, was superfluous.

Someone brought food for Doug while Kassandine finished his sermon. The concluding words were: "In these difficult times, a man must speak in fancied hyperbole. I hope some of you can understand. I say nothing to clarify. I make no explanations. With Fermaque the sky god, I can only hope."

There was a complete silence in the room as he walked toward the door. Doug dropped his platter of food and stood up. "A word with you, Kassandine," he said.

The preacher stared at him. "Yes?"

"Outside, if you don't mind."

Kassandine shrugged. "Come," he said, and led the way.

The hag cackled and began

her own more earthy sermon. The door shuttered closed behind Doug and Kassandine.

"I don't believe I know you," Kassandine said.

"You don't."

"Then?"

"I'm looking for Jaris, Lamicus' daughter. It's important that I find her."

"Lamicus I know," said Kassandine, frowning. "And who does not? Lamicus has been one of our chief politicians for a long time. But his daughter?" The tall man shrugged.

"Listen," Doug said, taking a desperate gamble. "I don't have the time and neither do you. Neither does anyone else on Karia. Jaris thinks I can help you people."

"Indeed?"

"Stop fencing with me. I know you're a member of the Exodus Party."

"There must be some mistake," Kassandine insisted. "If you will excuse me—" And Kassandine brushed past him toward the stairs.

"Hold it!" Doug cried. "I realize you're reluctant to admit it, but—"

"Not only am I reluctant. I deny it."

Doug stared at him. I'm right, Doug thought. He's afraid to reveal himself as a member of the Exodus Party.

Still, I could be wrong. If I am, and I admit my identity. . . . "Listen, Kassandine," he said. "One moment is all I ask."

Kassandine had reached the top of the stairs. "I'm sorry, fellow, but I must go."

"I'm one of the men from space!" Doug blurted. "Does that mean anything to you?"

For answer, Kassandine pivoted, ran to him swiftly, and slapped his face. It was a hard, open-palmed blow. It sent Doug reeling. "You dog!" Kassandine hissed. "You have the nerve to approach me after what you and your companion did? Karia looked to you for its last hope, and you forsook us." The hand was raised again.

Doug caught Kassandine's wrist in a strong grip, lowering the tall man's arm to his side. "Now, just a minute," Doug said. "I don't know what you're talking about."

"Lies! All lies! We brought you here, hoping desperately you could help us. But a word from that ignoramus Propus, one word, one threat, and you deny everything, deny even the fact that you are from space."

"Caretti!" Doug cried.

"What did you say?"

"It wasn't me. It was the other one. I can't be respon-

sible for his actions. I want to help you."

"Of course," said Kassandine sarcastically.

"You've got to believe me. Listen. Take me to Jaris. She knows. She'll tell you."

"And if this too is a lie? If it's a trick to inform Propus where we are hiding? Do you think me crazy?"

"I think you're sensible enough to take a calculated risk which might make possible the dreams of the Exodus Party. Kassandine, as you value your hope of salvation for whatever few Karians can still escape the catastrophe which is coming, take me to Jaris. That's all I ask."

For a long time there at the head of the stairs Kassandine looked at him. Finally, the gaunt head nodded slowly. "Come," was all Kassandine said. Doug followed him downstairs and outside.

It was not a building. It was a small kiosk which they finally reached after an hour's journey through the smouldering city. By now, darkness had descended, but shadows danced and leaped in the firelight of a hundred burning buildings.

"Once," said Kassandine, "we used to have sub-surface electrical transportation in

our city. But no more. It belongs to the physical sciences. It is taboo. My people are even afraid to venture into the old subways. It is here that I take you. Here where the Exodus Party meets."

Doug and Kassandine entered the kiosk after the latter made sure they were momentarily alone on the street. It was very dark going down the steep ramp. Doug could hear nothing below them. A musty smell assailed his nostrils, though, as if the subway had long been in disuse.

"You're sure they're down here?" Doug asked.

Kassandine smiled. "Come," was all he said.

They walked along the dark platform for a stretch, Doug feeling his way, Kassandine moving confidently. Then they descended to the tracks. A dull phosphorescent glow seeped from the walls. By its light Doug saw that the Karian subway had been a monorail, the long gleaming metal rail still unruined, still pointing straight ahead of them through the tunnel, as if waiting patiently for the subway train which would never come.

"Here," said Kassandine.

He pressed a side of the tunnel wall. A small doorway shuttered open. Brilliant light

stabbed out through it, blinding Doug. When he could see again, he was looking at Jaris' beautiful face.

"You're here!" she said tremulously. "We thought you would not come. We all thought . . ."

"He is the man of Earth?" Kassandine asked.

"Yes. Oh, thank you, Kassandine. Thank you."

The tall gaunt man shrugged. "Don't thank me, Jaris. I doubted him. He practically forced me to take him here."

"But the other one," Jaris said, biting her lip. "With his help, Propus can make trouble for us."

"As if we don't have enough trouble already," Kassandine said.

"I mean my father, you you know my father does what he can for us in the Legislature. But with the other one denying everything, echoing all Propus' accusations in front of the Legislature, my father won't be able to give us any help at all."

"Time is so short now," Kassandine pointed out, "that it hardly matters."

Doug said, "How much longer have we?"

"Until Karia is destroyed completely?" Jaris asked him.

"Yes."

Jaris shrugged, but Kassan-

dine said, "Months only, I fear. The tragedy of it, my friend, is that the proof of this has been with us for generations. But we've done nothing. First we fought our wars and then we banned every science with which war could be conducted. Between the two, we had no time to worry about the unstable interior of our planet. We had the science, we could have made preparations. In the generations of time which the gods gave us, we could have saved not a scattered few, but perhaps the entire population of Karia. Instead, thanks to our own stupidity, we're committing planetary suicide."

"Of course," Jaris said, "it's still only a theory. We still won't know if Karia will really be destroyed until it . . . it happens."

"I'm sorry," Doug said bleakly. "Karia will be destroyed. The proof of it is the asteroids which now, in my time, form a band in space between Mars and Jupiter. You see . . ." Abruptly, he stopped talking. Now, in my time, he had said. But where—when—was he now?

"Couldn't there be some other explanation for the asteroids?" Jaris asked.

It was Kassandine who said

there could not. "My dear girl," he told Jaris, "I realize how hard it is to face the truth, to face the incontrovertible fact that our world is doomed. But irrefutable proof is standing right before you." And Kassandine gestured dramatically at Doug.

Jaris nodded grimly. "Yes, of course . . ."

"You see," Kassandine explained to Doug, "we did what we could to summon outside help, although the chances seemed remote. We figured that somewhere, somewhere else in the solar system, there might be intelligent life, life which could help us. In theory, we have already conquered space travel—and, on a very limited scale which only admits the passage of one or two men at most, time travel."

"Time travel!" Doug cried.

"Yes," said Kassandine in his rich voice. "You see, all over the surface of Karia we planted these little crypts, each one capable of taking a man through space automatically from any other planet in the solar system to Karia, each one automatically adjusting for whatever lapse in Time had occurred. It was our faint hope that if Karia was blown asunder and if one of the crypts, floating free in

space, managed to be attracted by the gravitational pull of some other planet, and if there was intelligent life on that planet—"

Jaris looked at Doug and smiled. "All those ifs," she said. "It's fate that you are here, isn't it?"

"But you see," Kassandine told Jaris pedantically, all the fervor gone from his voice, "the fact that he is here, the fact that one of the crypts reached his planet Earth is proof that Karia will be destroyed."

Doug, who had never realized that his journey had encompassed more than mere space-travel, including travel through Time as well, said, "How far in the past did I come?"

"Our scientists were able to figure that out from the mechanism of the crypt," Jaris said. "Please brace yourself, for if we can escape from Karia you will never return to anything you know. The world which was familiar to you lies eons in the future."

"How long?" Doug insisted.

Jaris looked at him. She said, "Three hundred millions of your Earth years, Doug."

At first his mind refused to grasp the facts which so

plainly were laid before it. A hundred million miles of space. Three hundred million years. Karia still circled the sun in its age-old orbit. The asteroids had not been born yet. And Earth? On Earth the time of man was still measured in a geological second. Even the mammals had existed for but sixty million years. Three hundred million years ago—*now*—the dinosaurs, had not yet evolved out of the primordial slime. Earth was still a savage place of swamp and tropical rain forest and dragon flies with three foot wingspans and fat saurians plodding through the age-old mud, with memory of the sea still fresh in their racial memory . . .

"And it's to Earth that you want to escape?" Doug demanded.

"Yes," said Jaris and Kassandine together.

Doug threw back his head and laughed. He didn't want to. He was near hysteria, he knew. His mind could not yet accept the infinite chasm which separated him, forever, from all that was familiar.

"What's so terribly funny?" Kassandine asked him.

"I'm sorry," Doug said. "Truly I am. But if you expect to escape to Earth, then

you're doomed. It's written in our history. You will not make it. None of you. We're all doomed to die here on Karia."

There was a silence, which Jaris finally broke. "What makes you so sure?" she said.

"Earth's evolutionary record. Mankind will not appear on my planet for another three hundred million years. And, since Karia's going to blow up in a matter of months, that means no survivors ever reached Earth."

Now Kassandine was laughing. "It means nothing of the sort," he said. "You had me worried for a moment. But consider, Earthman. Does it not strike you as incredible that evolution should take such similar paths on Karia and your own Earth? Could mankind really have developed independently on both planets?"

"I don't know," Doug admitted. "I wouldn't think so."

"It's a virtual impossibility," Kassandine told him triumphantly. "Which means your own human race stems from the Karians!"

"But the evolutionary record, the slow climb from ape to half-man to man . . . Still, the missing link has never been found."

"Of course not!" Kassandine's voice was even more triumphant. "Because there never was a missing link. Because the ape-men you speak of were an independent development, doomed to evolutionary extinction. Man developed first on Karia, then went to Earth. It must be so."

"But no fossils anything like three hundred million years old have ever been found. No human fossils."

"That means nothing," Kassandine persisted. "Fossils are a rarity, an accident of nature. Conditions have to be just right. If a small band of humans survived over the eons on Earth, remaining small in number for millions of years until the natural conditions were right for them to spread out upon Earth and develop their civilization, the chances of any fossils being left would be slim indeed."

"What you say is possible. I don't know. I don't know."

"Then that settles it," Jaris said, a new buoyancy in her voice. "We'll have to go to Earth and prove it to you, that's all." She was now enthusiastic again. "We're building a prototype of our spaceship here in these caverns. We've been working for years in secret. It's almost finished now, but it's only a

scale model. That's why we need you, Doug. The theory of space flight we know. We can execute it in small models or in the hundreds of crypts we buried all over Karia. But a full-scale model, capable of saving hundreds of our people, is beyond our grasp, beyond our meager engineering ability. In that respect, you're our one hope."

"Let's see what progress you've made," Doug said. Abruptly, the magnitude of the task appalled him. What did he know about space travel? What actually did he know of aeronautics—and the unborn science of astronautics? It would be a grim joke if he couldn't help them at all.

"This way," Jaris began, leading them. "Right through here and—"

At that moment, there was the sound of running footsteps on the monorail tracks outside. A muffled voice cried, "I know you're in there, Jaris. My men followed you this afternoon."

"Propus," she cried in despair.

Doug frowned. It was possible. Propus had gone in pursuit of him, but he could have given it up and returned to his quarters, where news of

Jaris' whereabouts reached him.

"I thought I was so careful," Jaris said. "I thought I wasn't being followed. Still, in the darkness, in the confusion . . ."

There was a loud pounding on the door. "We're coming in after you," Propus called.

Something struck the door. There was a brief silence. Something shuddered against the door again. "Is there another way out?" Doug asked.

"Yes," Kassandine said, "but we can't leave our prototype. All our work. They'll destroy it."

"It's either that or ourselves," Doug pointed out. "If we escape, we'll be able to start all over again. If we don't escape, everything is finished."

"He's right," Jaris said, and led the way through a dark passage as the door shuddered behind them again. The passage opened into a cavern on their left and Doug had a quick view of a teardrop-shaped craft, perhaps fifteen feet high, resting on a cradle of metal struts. The prototype of the spaceship . . .

And then they were running beyond it, running until Doug's breath came raggedly, until his lungs felt afire, until his leaden legs, still un-

steady after the months of inactivity when his body lingered between life and death and was healed by the Karian scientists, felt as if they would not be able to support him a single step further.

But it was Kassandine who stumbled first, who collapsed slowly to his knees and then sank to the floor of the passage. "Go on," he croaked. "Leave me. I can go no further."

"We're close now," Jaris pleaded with him. "We've almost reached the other station, Kassandine. And you know we can't leave you. We need you. We need your inspiration."

Wearily, the tall man struggled to his feet. Doug leaned down and helped him, and for a moment after Kassandine regained his feet unsteadily, there was complete silence among them. And behind them in the passageway, they heard their pursuers.

"Come," said Jaris, and began running again. Doug plunged on after her, aware of Kassandine lumbering behind him. Tall, slim and long of leg, Jaris seemed tireless. But, Doug knew, she was running more for her own freedom, more even than for her own life. She was running that the human race

might survive. The idea gave strength to Doug's own legs. He gained ground on Jaris, told her to slacken her pace for Kassandine.

"But here we are," Jaris said, halting abruptly near a ramp which rose into the darkness of the Karian night.

Abruptly, Doug clamped his hand over her mouth. Her eyes looked startled, but then she heard it too. Voices above them, at the head of the ramp.

". . . crazy," a man was saying. "Propus won't find anyone in those dank caves, I'll wager. But we have to sit here all night."

"Silence, fool," said another voice. "It's good pay he gives us, is it not?"

"Still—"

Doug looked at Jaris mutely. Behind them, the sounds of pursuit came closer.

IV

DOUg waited until Kassandine reached them. The Karian preacher, apparently hearing the voices above them, needed no prompting to be silent.

"Stay here," Doug whispered. "I'm going up there."

"You'll never—" Jaris began.

"No time to argue," Doug

told her, and was already walking up the stairs boldly, making no attempt at stealth.

From above him, there was a sharp intake of breath and the sound of a small mechanism clicking into place as an unknown weapon was leveled, unseen in the darkness, at him. "Who are you?" a voice said.

Doug could smell the heavy smoke from the fires which were still consuming the city. He could see very little, but there was the gleam of fire-light on metal and two faces, vaguely pink in the glow, which were appraising him.

Instead of answering the question, Doug said, "What's the matter with you two? I was halfway up the stairs before you even knew I was down there. Is that any way to guard this exit?"

"Now, listen, friend," one of the figures said, "we don't even know who you are."

"Who I am doesn't matter," Doug said boldly. "You're in trouble, not me. I'll have to report both of you to Propus for dereliction of duty. I'd like both of your names."

"Hold on, friend. Can't we talk this over?"

"I don't see what we have to talk about."

"Well, maybe me and Lallo were busy thinking about

other things, but that doesn't mean we weren't ready. Right, Lallo?"

"Right," Lallo agreed.

The first voice continued: "Give us a break, friend. We've never had a bad report since we went to work for Propus. We'd like to keep it that way."

There was the suggestive jingle of coins in the man's pocket. "Well," Doug said, "I really don't know."

"Here, friend. Look at this."

The coins had left the pocket now. Doug came closer. As his eyes grew accustomed to the firelight he could see half a dozen silver-gleaming coins in the man's left hand, a hand weapon of some unknown design in his right hand. Doug walked directly in front of Propus' armed henchman, as if to study the offered bribe. But he bore down heavily and without warning with his heels, crushing the man's insteps with the sudden impact of his weight. The man yowled and leaned forward. Doug wrenched the weapon from his hand.

"Holy Fermaque!" Lallo cried. "What the hell did you do that for?"

The other guard was sitting on the ground now, gasping in pain.

Doug ignored him but kept his eyes on Lallo, who was still too bewildered to be angry. "O. K.," Doug called into the kiosk, "you can come up now. Hurry!"

Feet pounded up the steps. Seconds later, Doug was staring at Kassandine.

"Where's Jaris?" Doug said. "I—" But his voice trailed off. Kassandine's clothing was torn. His face was bloody from a gash above his right eye. "Propus' men," he panted. "They took Jaris with them."

Savagely, Doug whirled back toward the kiosk, but Kassandine grabbed his arm and cried, "Don't be a fool! If you go down there, they'll take you. If we stay here much longer, they'll come up after us. Don't you think Jaris would want us to get away and start the work on the spaceship?"

"Yes," said Doug, "but—"

"But nothing. Propus won't hurt her. Propus wants to marry her, remember?"

"Now who's a fool? If Propus makes her stay with him and Propus doesn't believe Karia will soon be destroyed, Jaris'll be left behind."

"Later," Kassandine groaned. "Please, for Jaris. Do it my way. Worry about Jaris

later. We have to save ourselves now."

Doug stood there, hardly knowing what to do. Lallo decided for him. Lallo, seeing him preoccupied in deep thought, suddenly lunged at him. Almost instinctively, Doug brought up the heavy hand weapon and then brought it down in a slashing motion that raked the sights across Lallo's cheek. Lallo collapsed with a scream. It was unnecessarily cruel, Doug thought. But they had Jaris. They had . . .

Sound erupted from the kiosk. Figures appeared, blinking in the firelight. Doug swung the hand weapon around and fired in their direction. He felt the weapon slap back against his palm, heard a faint explosive sound but did not wait to see the results. Instead, he turned with Kassandine and ran.

Work on the spaceship was all but impossible in the days which followed. Increasingly, Karia was shaken with violent earth tremors. A flood of refugees from inundated coastal cities made secrecy difficult to maintain. Regretting the necessity, Doug—who, as project engineer, directed the whole Exodus Party program here in the

rugged hills north of the city—was forced to transfer some of his mechanics to the security guard. It meant a further, agonizing delay, he thought gloomily. But it was necessary.

Once, five weeks after the project had been started, the security guards had let an unknown man slip through their patrols and head back for the city. A spy for Propus? It was possible, Doug decided. That meant they had to hurry more than ever, for the project was obviously illegal and would be dealt with swiftly and decisively if Propus learned its whereabouts.

There was vague talk of Caretti filtering through to the work camp. He had changed his tune again; he now admitted he was indeed from space, from the planet Earth. But, under Propus' guidance, he denied the existence of the asteroids, claiming that in the future Karia still swung in its orbit around the sun between Mars and Jupiter. When he heard this news, Doug shook his head bleakly. Apparently Caretti did not know that he himself was going to perish on doomed Karia.

And now you did not need a Time-traveler's foreknowl-

edge of a geologist's education to tell that Karia's days were numbered. By day the air was thick with sulphurous yellow volcano smoke. By night the sky glowed from horizon to horizon with incandescent volcanic material. Newspapers were issuing extras almost on the hour. This coastal city completely swamped by tidal waves—in seconds. This inland town crashing into an enormous earth fissure which had suddenly appeared, taking every citizen down to fiery death before they were even sure what had happened. This hill-country city caught in the path of a lava flow with barely enough time for evacuation to get underway.

Mostly, there was the constant thud and boom of distant explosions, the abrupt and frightening crash and roar of a closer subterranean blast, the ever-present shifting and twisting and trembling of the earth beneath your feet. It presented a grave danger to the partially-completed spaceship which was taking shape on a special shock-absorbent launching cradle. It meant that, as the fates decreed, the job would be finished or might any moment come tumbling down in ruins. It meant they could do nothing but build and hope.

Sleep was forgotten. Food was gulped. Rest was taken on the job, when and where you passed out.

The frenzy of construction, however, was a boon in one respect. No one had time to question Doug's leadership. As a result, work went smoothly, for Doug found himself readily capable of grasping the principles of astronautics and applying them, as project engineer, to the construction of the spaceship.

One day, Kassandine told him, "Well, that's the end of it."

"What do you mean?" Doug said. "We hit a snag? We can't go on. What is it?"

"You might as well know it," Kassandine said grimly. "We're all through."

Doug, whose mind was so fuzzy with lack of sleep, was ready to believe anything. But there was something in Kassandine's eyes, a certain over-readiness to smile despite the grim lines of the face, which didn't make sense. "All through, huh?" Doug said.

Kassandine nodded, but then, despite his best efforts, his face broke into a broad grin. "All through. Finished. That's right. The job is done, Doug. We've completed the

spaceship." And Kassandine, definitely not the howling type, jumped up and down and howled. All at once, he sobered. "Tell me, Doug. Will it work?"

"Go ahead and guess," Doug offered. "That's all I can do. I've followed your scientists' theories. The theory looks sound. But I don't know. I think that with a little more experimentation—"

"For which we don't have time, Doug."

"I know that. When are we going to leave Karia?"

"As soon as possible," Kassandine said. "Regarding an orbit for the planet Earth, sunrise tomorrow is the best time, for as this side of Karia swings toward the rising sun it will help cast the spaceship off, like a giant slingshot."

"But I thought there was going to be an elaborate series of tests to determine which of the Karians were most qualified to go. Those with the best genes, capable of producing the hardest next generation which would have the best chance of surviving on a primitive Earth."

"We won't even have time for that," Kassandine said. "The Exodus Party is going. That's all we have time for. There's chaos out there now. You haven't been outside our

camp at all since construction started. I have, Doug. If we even let the outside world know what was going on here, there would be no controlling the mob. Because, now that it's too late, they're beginning to suspect the truth. Karia's time is limited. A final series of internal explosions, a sudden great shifting of the ruptured planetary crust, an abrupt end for more than a billion people. . . ." Kassandine shuddered with the vividness of his own imagination.

"Then it's definitely tomorrow morning?" Doug said.

"Yes."

"Is there room for me?"

"By Fermaque, of course! You made the ship possible, Doug."

"Well, if I'm not back by tomorrow morning, give my place to someone else."

"If you're not back?" Kassandine gasped. "But where are you going? There's nothing but madness on Karia."

"To find Jaris," Doug said. Three words only, and he would say no more. It just wasn't for Kassandine's ears. Not now, not yet, perhaps not ever. He was an alien, from a distant planet. He had hardly seen Jaris, had spoken to her but twice and only once in detail or for any length of time. Yet his thoughts would

not leave her. It was as if, he thought, their union somehow meant the union of Karia and Earth and salvation for mankind in the Exodus from the dying planet to the young, chaotic one. He did not know why or how it was possible, but he was completely in love with Jaris.

Kassandine looked at him searchingly, placed a big hand on his shoulder. "I can see by your eyes I won't be able to stop you."

"No, you won't be able to stop me."

"You realize you're almost certainly going to your death out there?"

"Yes."

"If the crazed mobs don't get you, the earthquakes will. If they don't, Karia's liable to go boom any hour now."

"Yes."

"And you still want to go out there?"

"To find Jaris. Didn't I tell you that?"

And, with one brief glance behind him at the huge gleaming shape of the spaceship, lurid with the late afternoon glow as the sun sank into a dense cloud of volcanic haze, Doug headed for the edge of the compound—and the mountain road beyond it which would lead him to the city—and Jaris.

HORROR and violence. Long slow weary streams of refugees choking the roads, their sighing and groaning covering them like an audible pall. The weaker refugees falling by the side of the road, asking for water, begging for it. And the stronger ones calmly and without haste, quite carefully and objectively, so nothing was missed, stripping them of all valuables and proceeding on, ignoring their cries for help entirely.

It seemed to Doug that all Karia was bent on going in one direction and he in the other. The road was so choked with refugees that often he had to leave it entirely. Wagons and carts rumbled by, pulled by frightened beasts of burden resembling grayhound dogs but as big as horses, their eyes blindered against the fiery volcanic rivulets that crept down the hills and dropped, hissing and splashing, from the cliffs on all sides of them.

Behind Doug, the road led back toward the compound—and the spaceship. It might have been an accident, but it hardly seemed likely. Somehow, these plodding refugees had learned the whereabouts

of the spaceship and were now converging on it. Doug listened as the refugees filed by.

A tall heavy man: "I say take 'em if there's room, but otherwise kill 'em and use the spaceship ourselves."

A small frail woman with cold hatred in her eyes: "I say kill them, they didn't tell us, they kept everything secret."

And a man by her side: "That's for sure. They're probably destroying Karia themselves. That's what the Legislator Propus said."

This immediately caused an argument. "He did not say that," someone insisted. "He said Karia wasn't going to be destroyed. He said we had nothing to worry about."

"That was before the earth started to fall apart all around him, dunce. Now Propus talks out of both sides of his mouth."

"Never mind Propus. The spaceship."

"The spaceship."

And it was taken up on all sides, that cry. It gave strength to tired feet, it helped stragglers who did not want to be left out for lack of room catch up to the main body of refugees. Doug, who had been walking along the shoulder of the road at a fast

pace, began to jog. He had to hurry. Even now, there was no time. When this mob of howling refugees reached the spaceship there would be mayhem. They could go or the Exodus Party could, but the Exodus Party's scientists had been trained for space travel and for what exigencies they would encounter on Earth. Since it increased the chances of humanity's survival, the Exodus Party had to go.

Probably without me, Doug thought. Because I'm not going back there until I find Jaris. . . .

"Why, yes, I remember you," Lamicus told Doug an hour after he reached the city. "You're the Earthman . . ."

"Jaris!" Doug cried the one word.

"Propus has her. I've tried. I've already been impeached. I—"

"Where are they?"

Hope flared in Lamicus' eyes. "Come," he said, and led Doug outside to the madness of the streets. Along the way, Doug picked up a stout length of wood and carried it as a weapon.

He was using it five minutes later, at Propus' house. The guard asked too many questions. The guard was suspicious. The guard sum-

moned another guard, who turned out to be Lallo, who remembered Doug all too well, who cupped his hands to his mouth to shout an alarm . . .

Doug swung the club with both hands, like a baseball bat. It made a loud wet slapping sound as it struck Lallo's head. Lallo was dead before his bursting brain could stop telling him to stand.

"Help!" screamed the other guard, clawing for the weapon at his side.

Doug slammed the club against his arm, breaking the bone. Lamicus retrieved the fallen hand-weapon, and they both plunged inside the house.

They found Propus with his back to them, leaning over a desk. "At last," Lamicus said. "I should have done this myself long ago, despite the consequences. Where is my daughter, Propus?"

Propus sat there. Propus did not answer them. Propus did not move. "Hear you, Propus," Lamicus said. "I don't have time—"

But Doug placed his hand on the older man's shoulder. "Wait," he said, walking across the room to Propus. He put his hand gently against Propus' back and Propus leaned further away from them. At closer inspection,

Propus left arm was held stiffly away from his body. Something was protruding from the armpit.

It was the hilt of a knife and the long blade had gone cleanly through soft flesh to Propus' heart.

"But how—" Lamicus began.

"Caretti," Doug told him bleakly. "In the end, Propus must have been half-crazy, not knowing what to believe. But by then he was no longer useful to Caretti. Caretti realized Karia was going to explode, wanted to return to Earth, perhaps not knowing of the Time difference."

"Jaris?" said Lamicus, then called her name loudly through the empty house.

"It's no use," Doug told him. "I know Caretti. He probably figured I was at the compound and if he couldn't get in through violence, he could use Jarvis to bargain with me."

Lamicus nodded, his shoulders sagging. He followed Doug outside into the dying city.

The road to the compound was worse. It was something out of Ragnarok, the twilight of the Norse Gods. It was something out of the end of the world in every crack

of doom religion which had ever considered the eventual demise of a planet. It was something concocted of nightmare and madness and wild, screaming, clawing human beings reduced to animals. And more, above everything, it was the constant booming thunderous pulse-beat of Karia's death-agony, the mushrooming geysers of lava which dotted the black sky with their furious red, the knowledge that now, surely, scientific theories and counter-theories did not matter, this was the end of a world, this was its final hour when all mankind's hopes and dreams and yearnings would go up in a brief cosmic explosion which was the biggest thing man had ever seen but which by stellar standards was not particularly huge.

A howling mob surrounded the entrance to the compound. By the light of the fires they had kindled, Doug could see the spaceship, nose pointing skyward on the blastoff cradle. The crowd saw it too, and it infuriated them.

Caretti was talking to them, high on a stone outcropping near the palisade. It did not take much to kindle their hatred now, or their lust. But where was Jaris? Caretti was saying: "You

can take my word for it. I know. I've been there. I'm an Earthman. It's a place of milk and honey. All you have to do is force your way in there, overpower the Exodus Party, and let me lead you to new glory. Either they go, or we go. Either they die, or we die. Well, what do you say?"

With Lamicus at his side, Doug forced his way through the crowd. Angry stares met him, hands sometimes were raised in threat of violence. But he pushed his way through and opened the way for Lamicus and soon he was standing at the foot of the outcropping on which Caretti stood. He sought Jaris in vain at the base of the outcropping and in despair because he could not find her, he was turning back to Lamicus to say something when everything exploded in nightmare violence.

The ground trembled and shook. The mountains danced their last wild dance on all sides of the compound. Someone called his name. Was it possible? Explosions cracked and roared about his head. Had he heard . . . Jaris!

And then he saw her. She was with one of Propus' lieutenants who had evidently betrayed his chief to Caretti. She was struggling to

get free and shouting Doug's name although she did not even know for sure he was there. He pushed his way through the mob toward her, but once he stumbled and went down and by the time he could claw his way to his feet, Lamicus had reached her.

At the last moment, Doug shouted a warning, but it was lost in the noise of the crowd. Lamicus raised Lallo's hand weapon threateningly, and the man holding Jaris let her go. But someone else came up behind Lamicus and placed another weapon against the back of his head and pulled the trigger. Before Jaris' horrified eyes, her father was killed. She saw Doug then and came toward him weakly, stumbling, her eyes wide with horror. But now, with the fate of mankind hanging in the balance, he turned his back on her and headed for Caretti.

He hardly remembered climbing the rock, but all at once he stood alongside Caretti and then stood in front of Caretti and then was grappling with him. The ex-convict was strong and must have known he was fighting for his life. He began to force Doug back toward the edge of

the outcropping when Doug brought both his hands up suddenly, bringing their edges down on Caretti's shoulders, making the ex-convict scream with pain and release his grip on Doug's neck.

And then the ground suddenly yawned open on three sides of the outcropping of rock. Sulphurous fumes belched up on all sides of them. The rock teetered dangerously. There was a snapping sound. . . .

And Caretti was forcing him back again, over the brink of nothingness now. They struggled there, blinded, choked by the fumes. They rolled over the edge together when Caretti's body jerked convulsively with a final surge of strength. But Doug caught the edge of rock with his fingers and Caretti did not. He heard Caretti's howling above the crowd's roar, and then he heard it no more but slowly pulled himself out of the pit and leaped from the rock to firm ground seconds before it collapsed on the narrow neck of earth which held it and followed Caretti's body into the bowels of dying Karia.

By the time he found Jaris, the crowd had forced its way into the palisade. Jaris, her eyes glazed with the horror

she had seen, could hardly stand. Doug led her inside and somehow came close enough to the spaceship for Kassandine to see them. A flying wedge of volunteers to bring in the man and woman who, more than anyone else, had made the spaceship possible forced its way through the mob towards them. Kassandine, using his enormous shoulders like battering rams, was leading them.

In the end, though, the crowd proved too much for them. Kassandine had to lead his volunteers back to the spaceship empty-handed. But the diversion had done what physical force could not. With the crowd's attention on Kassandine and his volunteers, Doug and Jaris had slipped within the struts and girders of the launching platform and thence inside the ship itself.

Kassandine re-entered the ship with a grim expression on his face. When he saw Doug and Jaris waiting for him, he gasped something and then was pounding Doug on the back and for the second time his solemn, austere manner left him entirely.

"You made it," he said.

"We made it." Doug nodded, and watched while a doc-

tor led Jaris to the rear of the ship. They mumbled something about a sedative and said she would be all right with time. Everything would be all right with time.

In the end, Kassandine relented. They had beaten back the mob but they opened their airlock to all who could squeeze aboard as the sun began to appear for the last time in Karia's eastern sky. The sun was blood red and swollen, its outline vague in the haze and gloom. They did not see the sun clearly again until the spaceship had blasted off from Karia's rupturing surface and streaked up through its poisoned atmosphere.

Afterwards on the primordial Earth, there was one thing they never talked about. It was too big and too awesome and summoned grim nightmares. They never talked about it, but none of them ever forgot the sight as, mere days after they had left its surface, Karia suddenly sun-dered into jagged fire-borne chunks all of which seemed to rush outwards at once, scattering like sparks from a brand, into space. And when they looked again, Karia itself was gone.

THE END



SOMETHING is happening in science fiction. Anyone who has more than a perfunctory interest in the field must be aware by now that a certain discontent has brought about some disquieting effects. Magazines are folding; book publishers, both hard and soft cover, are bringing out fewer originals and reprints.

There is a variety of reasons, of course, for these phenomena. On the surface, the magazine problem is an easy one to answer: there are too many magazines for a large, but limited audience. Curiously enough, that audience is larger than ever before—but look at these facts: when, in the '40s, there were three or four magazines catering to an audience of perhaps 300,000, each could make money. With, let us say, an audience of two million or more, forty s-f magazines couldn't keep going. 2×10^6 divided by 40 comes to some 50,000 readers per issue—and we're forgetting the fact that the handful of leading magazines skim the cream off that two million by some three to four hundred thousand, counting duplications. The actual amount left to the rest is far less than the figure I have mentioned.

What about the book publishers? They say that there simply isn't as much interest in science fiction today as there was in the halcyon years of 1950-1953. Now, that isn't true. There are too many book publishers putting out too many copies of a book; a paperbound book publisher doesn't consider that he's making money unless he can sell a printing of at least 200,000. Once again there's been an oversupply.

But that still isn't the whole story. The fact is that science fiction is showing a species of dry rot. Although I except individual stories of merit, in general the s-f tale has lost much of the interest and vivacity it enjoyed in former years. In part, this is due to the era of easy sales for writers; they didn't have to work hard to sell a story to one of forty magazines. We're paying for that era today.

In addition, such setbacks as our field shows may be the result of what the psychologist calls the "plateau of learning." This is the gradual loss of impetus reached after the impact of a fresh study or idea is exhausted, and the student or reader—whatever you'd like to call him—has to pause while he assimilates the new things he's learned, and makes them part of himself. The usual course is then an upward curve, a rise not as steep, but steadier.

There's still another factor which affects science fiction as it affects all of literature. That factor is the writer's grasp of humanity—his understanding of the universality of character.

Science fiction is, among other things, a literature of ideas. For a time, the freshness of science fiction's ideas advanced the field. Then it became old-hat to speak of such things as rocket ships, time travel, BEMs, and extra-terrestrials—old hat, that is, in that we had become accustomed to them. The result was a fictional investigation of what some people called "ESP," and others, "psi powers." We were exposed to Odd Johns, Gestalt personalities, telepathy, telekinesis, and teleportation until every s-f writer and editor became scared of that black instrument on his desk because its name started with "tele-" too.

Now, this was actually a step in the right direction. We were getting away from the philosophy of the machine, and were investigating the philosophy of Man, who builds the machine. But we went too far in the wrong direction. We were investigating people who were as non-human in action and reaction as the robots and cybernetic machines themselves.

There are, after all, certain rules of writing which an author has to follow if he is to invest his story with suspense, entertainment, an identifiable situation and solution. Science fiction tried to break away from those rules, and couldn't.

The way I look at it, we're going to have to investigate our characters more thoroughly. We'll have to discover what makes them do the things they do, react the way they react. We must make readers identify with the characters and understand them. We readers must be able to respond emotionally to them. In other words, we want people human again, instead of superhuman.

How to do this? It's up to the writers—and their audience. The abysmal fact is that there are far too many writers in science fiction who have no business being writers at all. They don't know how to build a story, how to write about, much less understand, a character. Some can't develop a plot. Some become too limited, too precious. Others write with enormous facility, glibness—and boredom. As a famed editor once put it, a good story writes slowly—and reads fast. Where are the heroes and heroines who are human beings caught in a predicament the solution to which is contained in their character—is slowly, even painfully, developed until it becomes apparent that the solution is inexorable? Where are the human beings whom we know, whose thought processes need not be spelled out to us because we have identified so fully with them that we understand how they think and feel? When, to the fund of ideas which is at once science fiction's blessing and its bane we can add the complexity, the beauty, the fascination of the human spirit, we will see a revival of interest in our field which can make it an important part of American literature. It's up to the writers; it's up to the editors; and most of all, dear reader, it's up to you.

No professional writer should write from his heart and his bowels for a penny a word (it is a continuing source of surprise to me how many do). He has to live, too. So if you readers buy enough magazines and books now, enough to see the field through this difficult time of adjustment, you will guarantee a magazine's ability to pay a writer what his story is worth; you will encourage editors to select only the best of the stories submitted; and you will force book publishers to bring out more novels and short story collections.

You will, in other words, be helping science fiction.

EARTHLIGHT. By Arthur C. Clarke. 155 pp. Ballantine Books. Cloth: \$2.00; Paper: 35¢

In the 22nd Century, Earth and its satellite are opposed by

the colonists of the inner planets—the Federation. Reason: only on the Moon can the heavy metals so important for power be found—metals which have disappeared from Earth, and which have never been detected on Mars or Venus. A rebellion is in the making, and Bertram Sadler, an accountant turned secret agent, is dispatched to the Moon to discover who is sending classified information from Luna to the Federation. The seething pot boils over, and Sadler finds himself in an interplanetary war—which is resolved in one highly exciting battle.

Although Mr. Clarke is justly famed for the sense of reality which he gives his novels, he has gone a little slick with this one. While still better than most of the novels published in the last few months, the story does not possess that grasp of characterization which we have come to expect of him. His characters move north or south because he wants them to, not because those are the only directions in which they can go. In the long run, it will pay Mr. Clarke far more to write more slowly and carefully, than to grasp at the money offered him now for his prolificity.

STAR SCIENCE FICTION STORIES NO. 3. *Edited by Frederik Pohl.* 186 pp. Ballantine Books. Cloth: \$2.00; Paper: 35¢

Mr. Pohl proves, for the third time, that he is an excellent editor. Here he has collected a multifaceted anthology by ten top writers who, with varying degrees of success, prove that they are craftsmen with something to say. My favorites were Asimov's "It's Such a Beautiful Day"; Gerald Kersch's "Whatever Happened to Corporal Cuckoo?"; Chad Oliver's "Any More At Home Like You?"; and my favorite of the collection, the spine-chilling, beautifully-written "Dance of the Dead" by the incomparable Richard Matheson. Ray Bradbury, in "The Strawberry Window" proves a disappointment, but other stories by Jack Williamson, Lester del Rey, Arthur C. Clarke, Philip K. Dick, and Jack Vance make this, as always, an interesting and worthwhile collection. Get it.

FALSE NIGHT. *By Algis Budrys.* 127 pp. Lion Books, Inc. Paper: 25¢

Much of science fiction is an extrapolation of known reactions, events, and scientific discoveries. The most difficult

forecast is, of course, that determined by human psychology. It is here that Mr. Budrys has made his mistake. He envisions a world in which the U. S. has been decimated by bacteriological warfare. He sets the survivors against each other—man against man . . . and woman. They have no thoughts of responsibility to each other, of the Golden Rule, of ethics, religion, or morals. The rule is—kill or be killed. The most cunning of these killers is one Matt Garvin, who by successful artifice gains an army and proceeds to remake the United States by conquest. We then follow the careers of his descendants, as feral and cunning as Matt himself, who destroy themselves by internecine warfare. If you can disregard the plausibility of Mr. Budrys's premise you may find some enjoyment in this fast-moving, blood-and-thunder novel of the next hundred years.

TYRANT OF TIME. *By Lloyd Arthur Eshbach. 253 pp. Fantasy Press. \$3.00*

There was a time when men were heroes or villains, machines were the hope of the world, a sword was still a weapon and not a curio—and we were young.

There was a time when we believed in Mad Scientists; and who knew what fearsome dinosaurs roamed the Lost Worlds?

There was a time when, ostensibly, we had lost our belief in fairy tales, in young maidens clad in white samite beauteous in the moonlight—and yet we dreamt of elves and imps and dragons, of fair ladies awaiting the rescuing knight—who was always ourselves.

For those in whom this hope still dwells, who care little if the hero be made of cardboard, his desires as transparent and as strong as cellophane, his Excalibur emblazoned with the lettering—"Once upon a time . . ." then here are the unearthly screams, the eldritch monsters, the clang of swords, and the slaver of evil, lusting tyrants. If you can leave belief suspended and enjoy the delights of an earlier—and more naive—day, then "Tyrant of Time" is the book for you.

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION: Fourth Series. *Edited by Anthony Boucher. 250 pp. Doubleday & Co. \$3.50*

I have taken exception, in the past, to Mr. Boucher's grim

and determined pursuit of whimsy—particularly as embodied in the Professor Ransom stories of H. Nearing, and the “Gavagan’s Bar” stories of de Camp and Pratt. Since this volume includes neither, I find myself far more mellow toward this, the fourth entry in the series. Alfred Bester takes high honors with “Fondly Fahrenheit,” in which the walking atomic pile of s-f invests an old idea with new insights; Richard Matheson works his word magic with the realism of “The Test”; Daniel F. Galouye proves that telepathic powers can be a curse in “Sanctuary”; Arthur Porges gives us a gorgeous fantasy about a tiny god in “\$1.98”; the deadpan Robert Sheckley turns old plots upside down in “The Accountant” as he introduces us to a family of sorcerers; and “I Never Ast No Favors” by Cyril Kornbluth is a rib-tickler about a big-city juvenile delinquent in a witch-infested countryside. Other stories are by Ray Bradbury, Robert Abernathy, Poul Anderson, Avram Davidson, Albert Compton Friborg, Lord Dunsany, Shirley Jackson, J. Francis McComas, and Manly Wade Wellman—a collection of authors whose tales guarantee entertainment.

A TREASURY OF SCIENCE FICTION CLASSICS. *Edited by Harold W. Kuebler.* 694 pp. Hanover House. \$2.95

For those who are about to build up a science fiction library, or as a gift for someone you’d like to interest in the field, here is one of the best buys of the year. Many fans may find they have the originals from which Mr. Kuebler has selected excerpts—“First and Last Men,” by Olaf Stapledon, Aldous Huxley’s “Brave New World,” and “When Worlds Collide,” by Edwin Balmer and Phillip Wylie; or they may already possess the four complete novels, A. Conan Doyle’s “The Maracot Deep,” H. G. Wells’ “The Time Machine,” Jules Verne’s “Round the Moon,” the little-known sequel to his famed “From the Earth to the Moon,” and an abridged version of Garrett P. Serviss’ “Edison’s Conquest of Mars.”

“A Treasury of Science Fiction Classics” also contains the reading version of Capek’s “R.U.R.,” and the Howard Koch radio script of H. G. Wells’ “War of the Worlds.” A group of eight short stories by authors ranging from Edgar Allen Poe to S. Fowler Wright rounds out this large, splendidly edited book—a basic volume for any s-f library.

THE MAN WHO TALKED TO BEES

By IVAR JORGENSEN

Take a lonely man with too much time on his hands and an acute dislike for people, give him a volume containing the mystic knowledge of Hindu fakirs, and trouble will buzz around your head like a cloud of bees. But trouble, like a sword, cuts two ways!

HE CAME upon the phenomenon quite by accident. A man of inquisitive mind, he was forever investigating alien byways, and had accumulated quite a lot of completely useless knowledge; that is, if any knowledge can be classified as useless.

He knew how a gasoline motor worked although he was not a mechanic; he knew more about Einstein's theory than most persons of average mind; he was well up in the care and feeding of tropical fish, though they were not his hobby; he could cast a horoscope and discuss it intelligently, even though he had no belief in the potency of the stars.

His probable reason for

burrowing like a mole — he actually looked a little like one — through mountains of factual data, was because of his loneliness. And he was lonely because he refused to allow people to get close to him. The cross he bore was one of meanness, resentment, jealousy, sullenness. He liked no one because he was continuously measuring the virtues and abilities of those he met against his own weaknesses and shortcomings. As a result, people instinctively disliked him and avoided him. As they did so, he snarled at them from the door of his emotional doghouse and—except in the cases which developed into actual hatred—forgot them. He was a beekeeper by trade, knew the business inside and out, and told him-

self he was far happier with bees than with humans.

His active hatreds were highly poisonous, as they would be in a man of his type. At the moment, he was engaged in hating Colonel Winthrop who had moved into the house at the end of the lake and had come calling about a month before.

"I saw your name on a comb of honey I got at the village store, Mr. Parsons," the Colonel said, "and I was surprised to see it again on your mail box. Bees always interested me, so I thought I'd drop over and get acquainted."

Sam Parsons was civil enough; he even showed his visitor around, but it didn't take him long to see what kind of a man the Colonel really was; a snob wearing a cloak of affability; an aristocrat who loved to come down the hill and lord it over the peasants under the guise of democracy. Oh, Sam Parsons had an eye for character all right, but his analytical record was unique in that he'd never discovered an admirable person.

In less than ten minutes he had hated the Colonel cordially. After three or four visits, he'd have loved to see the man dead.

The new phenomenon he stumbled onto, stemmed from a book he picked up in a local bookstore. The title interested him — *The Principles And Practice Of Yoga*. He'd never given the occult much attention. Might take the boredom out of a few evenings. He bought the book and started through it that very night.

He was surprised at the clear, concise style of the writer—some Indian with a name beyond all comprehension—and was impressed by the fact that the man offered the neophyte no rewards for mere reading carefully. He wrote of rewards—physical and mental betterments, heightened abilities, supreme peace of mind—but his key to this treasure chest was work, drudgery, determination. The Indian stated with complete frankness, that ninety-nine people out of a hundred would get no benefit whatever from the book and would be wasting their time.

Sam Parsons accepted this as a challenge; a slur against his determination which was the kind reserved for only those capable of hating doggedly, unreasoningly, and wholeheartedly.

The book was in two sections—the principles, and the practice thereof. There were



Winged death burned through the air toward him.

physical and mental exercises clearly set forth; types of breathing; difficult and painful physical posturing; ways of forcing disciplinary concentration upon the mind, the theory being that the average person used only ten percent of his brain power and these efforts would whip the other ninety percent into action.

Sam worked doggedly, grimly, and the Indian with the big name never knew that he was on trial. Sam determined to do his part, and if the promised results were not forthcoming, that Indian was going to be the most cordially hated individual ever born of woman. He was going to be hated by an expert.

But Sam began getting results. He felt better. The small aches and pains that plague the reasonably healthy fifty-year-old body, left him for a physical exhilaration he had never known before. There was new spring in his legs and now the climb to the hives up on the knoll left no weariness in his legs.

But the physical betterment he experienced was secondary to the mental improvements. His mind was sharper and more penetrating than it had ever been before; a broader, more encompassing sense of awareness seemed to be his.

His senses sharpened and there was no weariness no matter how much he used his mind.

And his hatred for Colonel Winthrop brightened to the point where the pleasure he derived from it was almost a tangible thing.

Relative to concentration, Sam got to the point where he could sit motionless for two full hours with his mind centered upon a single thought.

Then came the tremendous revelation of power.

He was seated in motionless concentration one afternoon, when a fly circled casually into the room. Just as Sam finished his two-hour session, the fly alighted on the arm of his chair. Sam's mind pounced on the fly like a hawk on a chicken. In a burst of sublime foolhardiness, his mind said to the fly: *I can control you. My mental powers are stronger than yours.*

Sam had assumed, of course, that a fly has mental powers. He had no proof thereof. Neither did he have any real belief in his ability to control the fly, his thought being a mere gesture of mental exhilaration.

The fly sat motionless for a moment. Then it spiraled in-

to the air and settled on the ceiling. Sam's eyes followed it. His mind ordered: *Come back. Come back and sit exactly where you were before.* When the fly obeyed, Sam—still the level-headed fact-finder—charged it to coincidence. It could be nothing else. He looked at the fly. The fly was apparently looking at him. Sam's mind ordered: *Go over and sit on the third button of the jacket hanging by the door. Then come back.*

The fly went over and buzzed around the jacket, selected the third button, sat upon it for perhaps five seconds, then returned.

There were suddenly two forces fighting within Sam Parsons: his common sense, and an unreasoning conviction that his new-found power was indeed the McCoy. The fly had done exactly as directed. Twice. That eliminated coincidence. The percentages against subconsciously predicting the fly's exact movements twice in succession were astronomical.

It also seemed beyond all reason to assume that a fly could count to three.

Sam formulated another order: *Go over and stand on the doorknob.*

And it was then that a new phase of the thing developed.

From somewhere in the ultra-high frequencies in which Sam's mind had been lifted, there came a thought wave that was translated by his brain into a single word. The word registered in his highly sensitized consciousness:

Why?

Sam stared. And again came this concrete proof of a statement made long ago by a very wise man: There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio—

Why should I go over and sit on your doorknob?

Sam Parsons could reject the obvious no longer. He had achieved rapport with the mind of the fly! Its mental processes, however feeble and elemental, had been contacted, and translated into a symbol his own consciousness could understand.

Sam trembled and almost allowed his concentration to shatter into a million thought waves. Then he caught himself and replied mentally: *Because I tell you to.*

The fly seemed to be thinking it over. Then a vibration came back to Sam—a sullen, rather grumpy one, he thought: *Oh, all right.* And the fly went over and alighted on the doorknob.

Sam made three more tests, proved the thing conclusively.

Then he released the fly and slumped back into his chair, every muscle weary, perspiration pouring from his body. He sat thus for many minutes and then allowed himself a bit of recreation after all the hard words—some dessert after a meal of tough meat.

He gave his complete attention to hating Colonel Winthrop.

It was about three weeks later. The Colonel's phone rang. He was rather surprised to hear the voice of that strange little beggar up the lake; that odd one that kept bees; Parsons—yes, Sam Parsons—that was his name.

Parsons said, "I stumbled onto a little thing, Colonel. Thought you might like to drop around to my place and see it."

Parson's voice was so cheerful as to completely bewilder the Colonel. "Why, ah—yes—yes, certainly. I'd be glad to."

"This afternoon?"

"Yes, I'll come by."

As he walked on the rough lake road some hours later, the affable Colonel decided he must have been wrong about Parsons. Strange, though. He'd called on the man three or four times just to make sure his first impression had not been erroneous; had veri-

fied the fact that Parsons was a nasty little bore. No other term described him. Seemed to carry a permanent chip on his shoulder. The Colonel prided himself upon being a genial, fair-minded person, not easily riled. But upon the last visit, he'd been forced to tell Parsons what he thought of him—did it in self-defense, really. The little bounder had asked for it again and again.

But the Colonel was the sort of man who never held a grudge and felt sure Parsons wished to apologize. This in itself, was enough to make him accept the invitation. He always met people halfway.

Parsons was waiting at the front door; waiting with a big smile. That alone was a vast improvement over the last visit. He said, "Come in, Colonel, come in. Of course, my place isn't as large and imposing as yours, but—"

Colonel Winthrop frowned. "Good lord, man! What's that got to do with it?"

"Nothing—nothing at all. Sorry I brought it up. Won't you sit down?"

"Thank you."

Parsons sat opposite his guest with a smug look on his face. He got right down to business. "Colonel, do you see that fly?"

The Colonel followed Par-

son's indication. "There on the table? Why, yes. Ordinary house fly. Quite commonplace."

"No, there is something different about this one. He hates you very much."

"Now really, man—"

"It's a fact. Watch."

Parsons stared at the fly. He said, "I've developed a method of talking to insects, and I've told this one the truth—that you have only contempt for it—that you'd smash it with a swatter if you had the opportunity."

The Colonel was sure Parsons had lost his mind, but he had little time to ponder this because the fly's actions were fascinating. The insect spiraled up into the air and hung poised for a moment, buzzing angrily. Then it dive-bombed the Colonel. No other term covered the act. The insect did two loops and then shot straight down at the Colonel's nose. It struck, veered away, and then repeated the maneuver until it tickled the Colonel into a lusty sneeze. This disconcerted the fly. It shot up and hung near the ceiling, buzzing ominously.

The Colonel jumped to his feet. "This is monstrous, Parsons! I simply won't stand for it!"

"Sit down, Colonel. There is more."

"More?"

"Yes. You see—I plan to kill you."

The Colonel dropped back into his chair and gaped at his host. "Parsons! For heaven's sake! Why on earth would you want to—?"

"You're like all the rest, Winthrop. You think that a man must have a strong, emotional motive in order to kill. That's not true. Everyone would kill at one time or another if they could do it safely. My reason for eliminating you isn't earth-shaking at all. I merely hate you. You disgust me. I want to see you dead and I have the means. You see, I've learned to control insects, as I'm sure I told you—"

"Absurd!"

Parsons ignored the Colonel's doubt. "But more important, I've found a way to enlighten them. You see, flies, for instance, are not antagonistic to humans because they don't know humans hate them until they are swatted, and then it's too late. The reason that fly up there hates you is because I told him exactly what you think of him. He resents it. He too, would like to see you dead."

The Colonel fell back on

dignity. "I refuse to stay here and—"

"One more point that will interest you," Parsons said. "At first I could talk to only one insect. But I applied myself—broadened the power—and now I'm able to sway any number at once."

Colonel Winthrop had regained control of himself. He got to his feet and spoke sternly. "I'm going straight to the authorities, Parsons. You are mentally sick and you need help. It's my duty to see that you get it. I'm sure the psychiatric chaps can straighten you out." He opened the door and walked out of the house.

Parson's made no attempt to stop him; and when the Colonel got to the road, he breathed a relieved sigh. You couldn't always tell about these flighty characters. A man off his beam could do anything. Might even have a gun on the premises. The Colonel hurried down the road. He'd go home and get his car and drive to the village immediately.

He had gone scarcely fifty feet when there was a sharp, whining sound. The Colonel threw up a quick hand and just missed the insect that zoomed past his left ear. It veered sharply into his face

and he struck out again. A pesky honey bee.

The bee's motor revved up. It did an Immelman and came in again. A positively maniacal insect, the Colonel thought as he slapped at it. The bee avoided his clumsy swing, drove in, and the Colonel felt a sting on his right cheek.

And now came a second bee, a third, a fourth. The Colonel flailed wildly and looked about for shelter. There was none, but as his eyes came around, he saw a dark, hazy line streaming down from Parson's knoll. Bees. Thousands of them. Winging straight in his direction. The Colonel threw up his arms to protect his head, but he was pitifully helpless as the mad swarm encircled him and he became the core of a deadly whirlwind. He screamed and began running, but the bees worked with such swift, horrible precision that they were now upon him in thick masses, crawling into his clothing, entering every available orifice of his body. There were bees in his throat, choking him.

Mercifully, the Colonel did not suffer long. The ferocity of the mass attack stunned him, shot so much venom into his body that the shock of it rendered him unconscious.

He was dead in an incredibly short time.

The remains of Colonel Winthrop lay on a table under a white sheet in the back room of the local jail. The grave-faced coroner had just finished washing his hands. He turned to the county sheriff. "Terrible thing, Art — terrible."

The sheriff stared at the lumpy, shrouded form. "Bees. Good God! Stung to death by a swarm of bees. Ever hear of a case like it, Doc?"

The coroner pondered. "Once. A long time ago. In the town where I lived as a boy. But it was somewhat different. A man tried to take honey from a wild swarm in a tree. He wasn't adequately protected and they killed him."

"But the Colonel was walking down the road—minding his own business!"

"That's right. I said it was different."

"I never in my life heard of bees attacking like that."

"Freakish."

"What do we do?"

The coroner shrugged. "Bury him."

"I guess there's no action to be taken."

"Against Parsons, you mean?"

"Well, after all, he keeps

bees. They were probably his swarm."

"No doubt. But I don't see how you could hold him on a criminal action."

"Of course not."

"The Colonel's family might sue. That's about the extent of it."

"Out of my range," the sheriff said. "If there's nothing criminal involved I just stand by."

The coroner hung his towel on its peg. "Too bad. Tragic. Nice fellow."

"One of the best. Englishman wasn't he? I mean, didn't he come over from England?"

"Uh-huh. Struck you as being a little pompous—even overbearing, until you got to know him. I had a few talks with him. His main fear was that he wouldn't be accepted. Liked people. Wanted to be liked himself."

"Who doesn't?"

Sam Parsons was now spending most of his time in the rarefied mental heights to which his practice of yoga had lifted him. And with no comprehension of how badly yoga had failed him—or rather, how he had failed yoga by twisting its honesty and constructiveness to his own particular viciousness. He contemplated Colonel Winthrop's

terrible fate with great satisfaction; used it to magnify his sense of power. His ability to exact vengeance was infinite! As he continued to work and expand his mastery, there would be no limit to the satisfaction he could exact! He'd show them how dangerous it was to fool around with Sam Parsons!

There were minor reactions, of course; times when a small fear nagged him. What about the law of retribution? In an ordered world. Could evil be perpetrated with impunity? There were checks and balances? Could such freedom of action be tolerated?

But Sam was able to shake off these doubts by telling himself that he had transcended the law. After all, retribution in such cases as this could be brought about only through human intervention, and he was operating in a realm where human law could not touch him.

He had gone above the law! He could not be touched!

There was still a living to be made, however; hives to be stripped. He was preparing for this task a few days after the Colonel's death, when a new idea struck him. Why not use his power to increase the output of his swarms? It should be simple enough. His

bees certainly weren't working at capacity. Nothing in the universe worked to capacity unless forced to do so. While thinking this over, he carried a honey case to the knoll, set it down, and opened a hive.

It was interesting to listen to the reactions of the workers. How stupid they were! He'd taken honey from them again and again. Yet they did not realize that they were being robbed. They buzzed about, talked to each other, thought in terms of honey to be gathered rather than honey to be saved.

He reached in expertly to remove the combs. Then he stopped. Not frightened. Merely interested. There was something new here. An excitement among the workers. One he could not interpret. Almost immediately, its cause became apparent to his trained eye.

The queen had emerged.

His first thought was of losing the swarm. The queen had picked this moment to leave. The swarm would of course go with her. This was annoying. A swarm was valuable and the queen might travel for miles before alighting.

Then Parsons laughed. For a moment, he had forgotten

about his power. He looked at the queen; reached out toward her with his mind: *Stay where you are.*

So you've come.

The queen made no move to depart, which proved his power was still potent. But the reply to his order was a strange one. Perhaps it had been misinterpreted: *Stay where you are.*

You think you've found a loop hole?

Parsons frowned. Was this coming from the queen? Hardly possible: *Go back into the hive.*

You've made a mistake in your thinking. You can't go above the law because the creator of the law created you also.

Parsons felt a slight chill. *Get back where you belong.*

The queen sat motionless, staring at him. The swarm was strangely quiet: *The universe functions on a basis of law and order. Action and reaction. All is governed by exact law. If a single loophole existed, then creation would function by chance. In short, it could not function. It could*



not even exist. Its components would tear it apart.

Parsons felt a touch of panic. This was not the queen projecting. She was not capable of such reasoning. The same philosophic facets upon which he himself had been pondering.

His fear subsided. Merely another phenomenon. Somehow, his own previous thoughts were being reflected back to him. They weren't coming from the queen at all. She was only an insect and the mind of any insect was subordinate to even the weakest human mind: *Get back in your hive.*

You turned my workers to a base purpose.

Parson's chill returned. That was no reflected thought of his own: *Get back—*

The queen did not move: *Here, I am the law.*

There was a stirring in the swarm. And again, the thought-voice: *Did you think you could outwit the very force that created you?*

And Parsons realized it was, in truth, the voice of the queen, but that it came through her rather than from her. That it welled from her authority as a part of the law he had tried to flout. That she was only a bee, but that the law was everything. That

it manifested through all its agents from the tiniest microscopic life form to the planetary systems too vast to conceive. That no action could avoid its just and natural reaction.

The swarm stirred and rose. Frantically, Parsons ordered them away but it was as if he were closing an electric switch connected to no wires. They enveloped him in a hurricane of vengeance, their purpose plain.

He screamed.

The coroner wiped his hands grimly. "Two in a row," he said.

The sheriff stared helplessly at the lumpy, shrouded form. "What do I do? Arrest a swarm of bees?"

"Let's not be facetious. They certainly have to be eradicated."

The sheriff was offended. "Give me a little credit, Doc. I've already seen to that. Sent for a bee expert. He's on his way up here to gas them."

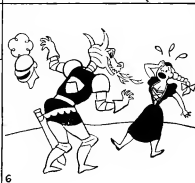
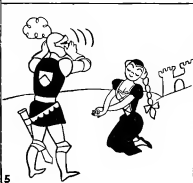
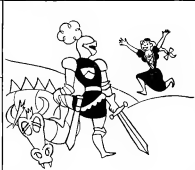


But from some strange source, wisdom was given the queen, who passed it on to the other hives. When the expert arrived, the boxes were empty.

THE END

When Knighthood was in Flower

by FROSTY



THE REVOLVING FAN



WHAT is the function of the fan in science fiction? To buy, and to read, to be sure. To be interested. To pass along that interest, in the form of his reactions, whether they be monetary, or verbal. To form that most amazing of phenomena (to the publishing business), a devoted hard-core coterie of readers, collectors, and potential writers. Even, it seems, to write about his favorite genre—to expound his views of his pet authors, stories, magazines, and books.

Alas! Something disruptive has entered the field of the fan. I refer to that all-too-human failing, that nitwit, penultimate, pismired plague which the fans, God bless 'em, have aptly named "egoboo." It is egoboo which makes a loud-mouthed puerility put out a fanzine in which his name is repeated four hundred and four times; which makes one man call himself "Mr. Science Fiction," to be villified by a second egoboob for the right to that all-too-amorphous title.

I complain also about the internecine wars which are always being waged in some place like Mule Groin, Idaho. Here, one group of the Mule Groin Welding, Steam Fitting, and Science Fiction Society puts out a fanzine the entire contents of which are one long diatribe directed against another group which claims the proud title of MGWSF&SFS.

I dree my weird also, and turn widdershins against the fanzines whose editors and/or publishers attempt to grasp the egobauble of fame with a display of so-called humor. These poor man's George Gobels usually wind up relaying some point of wit originated by Walt Willis or Joe Miller. My

advice to them is—we're not interested—most of us—in what happened in your hotel room during the last Convention, nor in the devastating remark by which you scalped some hard-working writer's ego to add to your coups. Do something constructive. Be a fan. Ah, well. . . .

FANTASY-TIMES. *Issues No. 208-215. Oct. 1, '54—Jan. 2, '55.*
Fandom House, P.O. Box #2331. Paterson 23, N. J. 10¢.
12/\$1.

I hasten to explain that the ill-tempered remarks noted above do not refer to FANTASY-TIMES, nor to most of the fanzines reviewed in these columns. FANTASY-TIMES is an outstanding example of the value and utility of a properly written, edited, and published fanzine. In the seven issues received here since my last review, this invaluable 'zine has reported such news of interest to the fan, writer, and editor as stories on forthcoming changes in some of the field's leading prozines, a review of 1954 in books and magazines, interesting and informative news from overseas, news of coming conventions, and a surprisingly thorough coverage of the field. A "must" for every person seriously interested in science fiction.

* * *

INSIDE AND SCIENCE FICTION ADVERTISER. *Issue #7. Jan. '55.*
111 S. Howard, Tampa, Florida. 5 issues \$1.

Note well that Inside and S-F Advertiser have merged, and that the address has been changed. In this clear, well-illustrated offset job, the kickoff is a gimmick, in which two writers, Joseph Slotkin and Edward Ludwig, attempt to write stories around a given title, "The Martian Who Hated People." Slotkin's is a respectable effort, but Ludwig takes the prize with three versions showing how Bradbury, Lovecraft, and A. Conan Doyle would have written the story. Ross Rocklynne writes a confusing and confused article, "I Hope You Are Shocked," in which he attempts to explain science fiction; Jim Harmon gives a lengthy and laudatory story on the birth and subsequent career of Galaxy Magazine; Paul Blaisdell writes a nice wry tale of his "Introduction to Fandom"; an excellent book review department, one containing letters, and a clear-headed editorial by editor Ron Smith wrap up this excellent issue.

PSYCHOTIC. *Issue #17. Nov.-Dec. '54. Richard E. Geis, 2631 N. Mississippi, Portland, Oregon. Apt. 106. 20¢; 5/\$1.*

Another clear offset job whose contents, however, are not as lucid as its format. Mr. Geis starts things rolling with a discussion of what he calls "crudzines," i.e., the worst of the fanzines. His point: that they deserve to be reviewed as pitilessly as any other fanzine, regardless of the fact that there may be such extenuating circumstances as youth, lack of money, inexperience, etc. Vernon McCain in "The Padded Cell" gives readers the benefit of his scholarly research into the collaborations of s-f authors; Larry Stark's story, "Dirty Pro" is a bit of unsuccessful esoterica; Noah McCloud's book reviews in "The Psycho-Analyst" are literate and scrappy; a column of fanzine reviews, and the issue closes with a lengthy department of fan letters.

* * *

PEON. *Issue #34. Feb. '55. Charles Lee Riddle, PNCA, USN, 108 Dunham St., Norwich, Conn. 20¢; 6/\$1.*

Lucid, literate, well-mimeod, a pleasure to read, PEON is always worth waiting for. Dave Mason's story, "The Tenth of February" is worthy of inclusion in a prozine. The indefatigable Robert Bloch discusses the morality of writing in "Pruriency, Anyone?"; John Magnus gives a report on "Rooms At the Con" which could just as well have been omitted; and in "A Reconsideration of S-F Ideas," S. J. Sackett demonstrates some nice ideas which are mangled by a too-abstruse style. Terry Carr's "Fantastuff" is a welcome column of gossip; Jim Harmon writes a wittily ironic satire on convention manners and other oddments; T. E. Watkins "Kan Kan Kibitzer" uses a fast riposte on editor Harry Harrison and writer Isaac Asimov. Reviews of sundry fanzines, and a worthwhile department of news and views by the editor. Fine stuff.

* * *

KAYMAR TRADER. *Issue #90. Dec. '54. K. Martin Carlson, 1028 Third Ave. So., Moorhead, Min. 10¢; 3/25¢.*

Except for three pages set aside for 1) a description of s-f and fantasy in magazines at the turn of the century; 2) a suggested basic s-f library; and 3) a listing of borderland books by Donald Susan, the rest of this 28 page issue is taken up by advertisements.

ISFA. Vol. 1, 5. Dec. '54. *Indiana Science Fiction Assn.* 5645 N. Winthrop St., Indianapolis, Ind. 15¢.

This fanzine and PHOBOS (see below) are new ventures by a group of hard-working fans who, unfortunately, spend far too much time speaking of matters best known to perhaps a score of people, and too little concerning matters of interest to general fandom. A story, "Emilie" is best passed over in silence. A satire, "The Man Who Hocked the Moon," by Robert Rhymedline, is not without some humor. Outside of these, some random reviews and letters, that's all. A poor mimco job finishes off a 'zine which has a long way to go before it can hope to be called "acceptable."

* * *

PHOBOS. Vol. 4, Nos. 3, 4, 5, 6. Nov. & Dec. '54. Lee Anne Tremper, 1022 N. Tuxedo St., Indianapolis, Ind. 5¢; 12/50¢.

Although Miss Tremper is a member of ISFA (see above), she puts out her own fanzine. I suggest to Messers Adair and McNulty, editors of ISFA, that they study Miss Tremper's job. The 'zine has its faults, but some of the stories are quite good, and a certain breathless, schoolgirl quality set by the editress' editorials is not without charm. J. T. Crackell's stories, especially one called, "In The Service of the Seigneur" are better than average. Robert Coulson joins Crackell in reviews of s-f hard-and-soft covers. Worth getting, especially at the price.

* * *

That's it for this issue. If you take exception to what I've had to say in my introductory remarks, wait until the next issue! There's plenty to kick about in the fanzine field . . . as well as much to praise. I'll try to do both—with as much zest in the second category as in the first. So please keep your fanzines coming in to me—Roger De Soto, 361 East 50th St., Apt. 6G, New York 22, N. Y.

ATTENTION FANZINE EDITORS

The Editors would like nothing better than to give full coverage of the fan-publication field to the readers of *Amazing Stories*. Make sure a copy of *your* effort reaches us promptly for inclusion in this free service.—ED.



...OR SO YOU SAY

BY THE READERS

Dear Sir:

May I have a little space in your magazine to say what has been on my mind for the past twenty years or longer. I have read *Amazing Stories* since the first one came out around nineteen thirty. I am not sure of the exact year but I can remember the first impression I received of the idea that man could travel to the stars. The thrill of the thought has never left me, although I am getting up in years. I hope I live to see the day that this is accomplished, even if it is just a manless rocket shot to the moon.

I do not believe I have ever missed a copy of your magazine and hope I never do. All these years I have sat back and read your Readers' Pages and never said a word for or against the comments, but now in all justice I feel that I must say that your magazine has satisfied me in every way it is possible for a reader to be satisfied. Some of your stories have stunk and some have been excellent, but on the whole I have been buying and reading, waiting anxiously for the next issue. In other words I like it. Your magazine I mean.

Some readers want to change your policies and such, but as long as you continue to print good interesting stories (whether they are believable or not), I will continue to buy and read. I do not like the present small type magazine, but as I purchase it for the stories alone, I will never kick as to whether you have articles, readers' pages or just blank pages where

the reader speaks his mind. Just keep on giving us good stories and I will read them until we both die of old age.

W. D. McArthur
10463 Sharp Avenue
Pacoima, California

● *Letters like yours, Mac, are wonderful to get. There's a danger in them, however: sometimes an editor gets to thinking that taking pains in turning out the best magazine possible isn't really necessary. Some editors have succumbed to the temptation of doing their work with the left hand; in fact the boneyard is full of them! So far we've managed to avoid the trap, and the best stories we can get will continue to appear in these pages.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

I have just finished my first issue of *Amazing Stories*, your second this year. I guess I just naturally turn to the departments first, even before I read the features. I must say that yours was not hard to find since you have only one department. It was like walking in at the middle of a movie when I read the letters. I gathered that there'd been a change in *Amazing* and that some people didn't like it. I should say for myself that I read your magazine and that I like it just fine. The only other s-f magazine on the stands now that I like better is ASF.

You see, I utterly live for, by, and in s-f. I've loved that glorious field since before I knew what it was called. The reasons for this devotion are many, but a few of the outstanding ones in my case are: because I've sweat blood for s-f while my friends ribbed me about trips to the moon and the like; because I plan on making my living at writing s-f; and because I want some day to see these stories that are now fiction turn into fact. In my young life (14½) I have noticed some things about my beloved profession. These things have aroused my curiosity. I should think that you could be able to answer some of my questions, so I'm taking advantage of your offer to "Speak Right Up."

1). I've noticed that most of the writers in the s-f field are men. This bothers me for one very good reason. I'm a girl. Could you tell me why this is so? (*Not* why I'm a girl.)

2). I'd like to know how to break into the racket and what it takes to do so.

3). How do you get to be good enough for s-f mags to solicit your work and how long does it take before they do?

4). I have several good ideas of my own that I'm fairly sure would sell if I had the nerve to send them in to a magazine. I guess I'm afraid of getting turned down. What should I do?

I could use a little bit of encouragement. It would be more than I get at home even if it's only a little bit. If you could answer these questions it would help me immeasurably and I would appreciate it even more.

Cathleen M. M. Harlan
3038 N. E. Arthur St.
Minneapolis 18, Minn.

● *You don't make it easy, Cathleen—but here goes. 1). Few women write s-f because few women are interested in science. 2). The way to break into the "racket" is to learn how to write fiction. Since practically every pro writer learns how to do so in a way unique to himself, there is no sure-fire method. Our own method was to be an omnivorous reader since childhood, followed by years of careful analysis of the works of great, and good, writers; learning the rules of grammar and punctuation; then starting to write. Patience is of paramount importance, plus the ability to recognize whether you actually want to be a writer. It is so easy to delude yourself into thinking you want that kind of life: seeing your name in print, cashing big (?) checks, having friends point you out as a "writer." What few neophytes recognize is that writing is hard, often frustrating, labor, that loneliness is its handmaiden, and that the odds against even reasonable success are overwhelming. 3). There is no answer to this question. 4). If you are afraid of rejection slips, forget about writing in the first place.*

You see, Cathleen, writers write whether they get encouragement or not. They have to write. When an editor sends them a note along with a rejected ms., saying: "Nice try. Do let us see more of your work,"—the true writer digs in five times as hard to make the next script that much better. Acceptance can come with the first script or the five hundredth—but the will to write must never flag—ED.

Dear Editor:

Well, it's about time! I had just about lost hope for *Amazing* and *Fantastic*, and was ready to quit buying them, collection or no collection.

Like quite a few fans, I cut my teeth on the science-fiction in *Amazing* back when it was a pulp. When it changed to a slick I thought its format would remain the same. I picked up the first slick *Amazing* and . . . Egads! Barren! A list of stories, a list of authors, and a list of page numbers side by side. Nothing else. Just like Liberace without his teeth. (No direct analogy, I assure you.) The letter column returned in one issue, May, '54, I believe, but disappeared again to Ghunknowns where.

Anyhow, I bought that first slick *Amazing* out of pure faith. Then as the months went by and still no articles or letter column appeared, I began buying it merely to keep my collection up to date.

Why was it you dropped all but the stories? So you could have colored pictures? To Hades with colored pictures if they jeopardize the quality of the magazine. Yours definitely did. The pulps spend their money on better interiors, big name covers, and long letter columns. Sure they print second-rate stories, but they sell, don't they? I'm not suggesting you go out and buy up a lot of second-rate space opera, but the point I'm trying to get at is this: people don't buy a magazine only for its stories, however good they may be. People like to know who they're buying from, even if it's just through a short editorial like H. L. Gold puts out once a month. I personally think this change is the best thing you've done for the past three years. "The World's Leading Science Fiction Magazine"? Not now, but maybe some day.

John Mussells
4839 Shelby Avenue
Jacksonville, Fla.

● *You should have written this letter a couple of years ago, John; not now, when all the things you've railed against are no longer with us. And you're strictly out of your head when you try to tell us that even second-rate stories are okay so long as departments and interiors are good. You'll get your departments and interiors from now on, but the standard of*

stories is going to continue to be the highest available. And we've restored the editorial in both Amazing Stories and Fantastic. They probably won't be much like the editor's remarks in other magazines, but they'll be editorials!—ED.

Dear Editors:

You poor people! Everyone has to get into the act, don't they? And usually all they have to say is bad. So before I begin what I hope are constructive criticisms, I want you to know that I think your magazine a good one, and I enjoy it very much.

To me, science fiction is marvelous literature. It can be both relaxing and thought-provoking. It is an extremely versatile field; why then not conform its art with the quality of the literature?

I am always half-ashamed to have my friends see the stacks of s-f magazines I have about the house with their gory, weird and completely misleading covers. I flinch at the condescending glances, the lifted eyebrows, and I find myself constantly on the defensive about them. I can understand this easily, for if a friend had not caught me sick in bed with no other reading matter available, and introduced me to science fiction, I would never have become interested. The magazines looked cheap and completely horrible.

I know you must sell your magazines. I would like to believe that the average American does not have to see such covers in order to be enticed into reading them. Surely a little more dignity in cover designing will not lose too many readers. It might gain you some valuable ones.

I back this up by pointing out that in the field of mystery magazines, those with plain and simple covers (Mercury, The Saint, etc.) enjoy great popularity. Bloody knives dripping from the cover do not seem to be essential to sales. It seems that mystery fans have been educated beyond that stage, and I believe it's high time science fiction does the same for its readers.

It is my heartfelt conviction that science fiction can "condition" our present age for the future, that once those who live mundane lives allow their minds to wander with imagination, hope and confidence, through science-fiction stories, the probably "amazing" future will not come as such a shock.

You have a trust to the people. I think you could fulfill this trust more fully by including a rather non-technical article on some modern scientific accomplishment in each issue. It could relate to some theory presented by an author in the same issue. I for one would benefit.

Mrs. Klyde Stephens
311 West 18th
Stuttgart, Arkansas

● *This busines of "condescending" glances from non-readers of science fiction has always been painful to fans. We can't see why. No one should have to apologize for anything he does that is not illegal, immoral, or fattening. The same woman who gave you the most condescending glance was probably wearing a hat that would send Bela Lugosi screaming into the night. As for "gory" covers, that phase is pretty much passé today among the leading science-fiction magazines. . . . This talk about having "a trust to the people" always staggers us. We're attempting nothing more than offering entertainment; Lord knows the woods are full of people trying to "save" and "educate" humanity. . . . Articles that have not previously been done to death in magazines of popular science, are almost impossible to get.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

I've never enjoyed science fiction before. But I was attracted to the March cover and decided to give it a try. To my amazement I enjoyed the book from cover to cover.

I think you can improve the magazine by adding extra features.

The stories I enjoyed most were "The Rusted Jungle" and "Two to the Stars."

I've only read one issue but I'll not miss any of the coming ones. The cover on the March issue was a striking one. But I think you could improve on the inside drawings.

Joseph Hripke
121 South Dunlap
Youngston, Ohio

● *Welcome into the club, Joe, and let's have your opinion of this issue.—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

The March, 1955, *Amazing Stories* was superb. Why? you're thinking. Well, I'll hurriedly tell you about it. "The Rusted Jungle," by Milton Lesser, was excellent and totally the best story of them all in the March lineup.

"World's Leading Science-Fiction Magazine" is probably right. *Amazing* is now, at last, on the right road. I find great satisfaction in it and also in *Fantastic*. . . .

I guess it'll do you good to know that I liked Ivar Jorgensen's "Blessed Are the Murderous"; it made him Writer of the Year. It was so cave-manly.

Try to see you next issue.

James W. Ayers
609 First Street
Attalla, Alabama

● *Jorgensen happens to be a very cave-manly type guy.*—ED.

Dear Mr. Browne:

I first started reading s-f from magazines such as *Galaxy*, *Astounding*, and *F & SF*. Then I picked up *Universe* and I was introduced to Ray Palmer, an old friend of yours. Being used to the type of magazine I first started out with, *Universe* seemed to deviate from the supposed norm. But then I found some issues of Palmer's old magazines and I saw just what a science-fiction magazine should be.

In my opinion, *Amazing* has the best-put-together magazine in the field; the covers are the best, next to *Galaxy*. I think that you could really join the Big Three with just a few additions.

These additions are: A long Readers' Page. (This is lacking in all of the Big Three magazines.) A long book review section. Fan news! You, sir, know that this will bring you the love of many thousands of people. If somehow you could get Bob Tucker to write this for you—!

As for the fiction in the last few issues, I can't truthfully say that I read all of it, but what I did read was a very good standard of writing. I especially enjoyed "And Now You Don't" and "The Rusted Jungle." But, in the latter story, who would run away from the Wehawk women? That guy must have slept longer than he thought.

"You don't need a Shaver Mystery to go to the head of the

field. Just keep up the standard you've been steadily holding, but don't reach stasis. No, you don't need sensationalism to capture the attention of most true science-fiction readers. Just get some of the big names, like Heinlein (does that guy write anymore?), Sturgeon, Bradbury (same comment as for R. A. H.), Fred Brown, C. M. Kornbluth, etc. I know that's a pretty big order, but if there is some way to entice them into writing for you, it'd be wonderful. Maybe if you could get one of the few stories that Al Bester or Richard Matheson writes these days, and played it up big. . . . Get the old Z-D boys to unloosen their money belts and tell these guys who write that they'll pay them as much and more than they're getting anywhere else, and they'll come a-running! Easier said than done, though. I spend your money very easily, don't I?

Now my solution to the Book Review Section: Go monthly! Do it and you'll hit the stride of the Big Three—and go beyond them, too.

Anything I say now seems to let down from that last paragraph, but I just want to say, I love those cartoons! Get more! They seem to be the fad in s-f magazines nowadays.

Alan Chuse
154 Lewis Street
Perth Amboy, N. J.

● *All three departments you mention are now in Amazing—along with the editorial page. The fanzine review section hasn't brought us the "love of thousands of people" yet, but we're getting ready for it! . . . The so-called "Big Three" have their place in science fiction; Amazing Stories has a place all its own—and it's 'way up there!—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

The noble experiment ends, at least for now, and although I mourn the back cover paintings, the colored interiors, and above all the great stories, I welcome back the features; and though the "Rusted Jungle" was no "Here There Be Tygers," it was a hell of a lot better than the "literary" trash that came in between.

Maybe now is the time to start anew the cry for an *Amazing Annual*. If I remember right a fan named Richard Lupoff asked for one toward the end of the pulp *Amazing*. He wanted

a 1926 AS Annual composed of stories from the *Amazings* of that year; then a 1927, 1928, etc.—right up to date. There are some great stories there: Doc Smith, Eando Binder, Russ Winterbotham—men still writing today. Plus a good many who are only legends to the world of science fiction. And the old features would be fascinating to read: editorials by Gernsback, Sloane, Palmer—articles like Richard Shaver's "proof" of his caves, deroes, etc., now found only in the pages of *Mystic*. Even the old book and fanzine reviews and the letters will take on new interest in the light of the present day.

But back to the new *Amazing*. The cover (for March) was fair, though somewhat garish. The interior illustrations were poor to terrible except for those in "The Rusted Jungle." The letters were fair, will be better. Mr. Spalding may be starting a new Shaver Mystery, or more likely, Dianetics. Now if you'll let the reader go on the subject, you'll get something like the letters in SS-TWS-FSM.

The March stories were all well-written, but showed absolutely no originality. "The Rusted Jungle" (far and away the best in the issue) and "Two to the Stars" shared the same post-atomic-destruction background *Amazing* has been using since the 30's. Why doesn't somebody write a story that takes up where these left off, when the reawakening has occurred and the rebuilding begins. Lesser has the perfect setup. For that matter so does Jorgensen, but I just like Lesser's writing, I guess.

Leinster's "Psionic Mousetrap" was the standard spy-in-Russia story and need not have been science fiction. Leinster wrote his hero into trouble and then used the psi gadget to legislate him out. Though the style was not bad, parts of the story were overlong and others far too short.

"You Could Be Wrong" was not up to Bloch's usual. The whole story was slight, poorly told throughout (if the aliens destroyed the U. S. so easily they hardly needed the elaborate fake while they waited for the rest of the world to die off—they could kill them too), and an example of a them (modified solopsist: the whole world is a fake, only *I* am real) which has long since been thoroughly explored. The need is intensive, not extensive, development.

"Dissatisfaction Guaranteed"—oh, come now, Browne. If the other stories in the issue have been written dozens of times

before, this "Change your wife and find she was better before" business has been done tens of thousands. The other stories at least had redeeming features about them. But this one is too much.

So it seems I knock the art, the stories, the letters—yet I like the magazine. How come? I guess I like the atmosphere, spirit, the personality of the new-old *Amazing*. I know *Galaxy* publishes far better stuff, and I read it regularly, but I like AS much better.

Here's to the new-old *Amazing*, to the coming AS Annual, and to the big Thirtieth Anniversary issue due next year.

Frank Arthur Kerr
10100 West Broadview Drive
Miami Beach 41, Florida

● *We doubt, to the point of actual disbelief, that Annuals such as you describe would sell in numbers large enough to make such a project profitable. Fine for the dyed-in-the-wool fan—but there just aren't enough such fans for a sixty- to seventy-thousand copy sale. . . . We think Reader Spalding will be the first to deny that he hopes to start a Shaver or Dianetics following. . . . Your opinion of the stories in the March issue was interesting and your own; but don't expect us to agree with it. . . . If you want to spend 35¢ a month for personality, we'll try to keep you from feeling cheated. Let's hear from you again, hey?—ED.*

Hi, Editors:

Just finished scanning your latest (March) issue of AS. I didn't find a distasteful story in the whole bunch. I'm just in high school, but I can tell a good story when I read one. I especially liked "The Rusted Jungle," by Milton Lesser; second, "You Could Be Wrong"; third, "Two to the Stars"; fourth, "The Psionic Mousetrap"; last, "Dissatisfaction Guaranteed."

That ribbon-slasher, Lesser, sure knows how to use a plug! *Amazing Stories* used as a history book in the future! Boy!

But what happened to Bradbury. My favorite—and my Dad's too. . . . And let me say yours is the *only* mag I pay a whole 35¢ for. And if your next issue is as good as this one, I'll keep on paying that for it.

. . . OR SO YOU SAY

Before I forget it, congratulate your art editor and his artists for their fine work.

Keep up the good— No, it's better than good. Keep up the perfection.

C. Jackson, Jr.
2734 Anna Street
Shreveport, La.

● *Aw shucks, Jackson, 'twarn't nothin'.*—ED.

Dear Sir:

I am looking forward to reading the future issues of *Amazing* if what you stated in your reply to Guy Terwilleger is true. I have been reading your magazine for six years and the loss of these features grieved me.

The action story especially will be welcomed. Not that I believe you should make your magazine all action stories. But a good escapist story in every issue would round it out much better, at least in my opinion.

I enjoyed your interior drawings and feel that they are indeed a step upward. However, I do wish your artists would pay closer attention to the stories they illustrate. For instance, in your first story's illustration, the hair was too short, the fingernails shorter than a yard and there were ten of them, all unbroken, contrary to the story itself.

All in all, a pretty good issue. Keep up the good work.

Daniel G. Rose
Box 734
Seward, Alaska

● *You've got a good point, Dan: illustrations should, within possible limits, follow the story exactly. In the case you quote, Beecham probably took some artistic license to make objects clearer and more dramatic.*—ED.

Dear Howard:

This letter is about a week overdue. I was going to write earlier, but the January aSF arrived before I had a chance to read "Satisfaction Guaranteed." I still haven't, by the way; but here's the letter regardless.

Surprising how the old mag has picked up since starting

Volume 29. I am tempted to give much credit to Remback-Valigursky (no, artists don't have pen-names; they have brush-names). The January cover would have been grand were it not for the horrible face on that guy in the spacesuit. Of all the covers on the magas this month, Valigursky's for AS is second best. (Number 1—Freas for aSF.)

I suppose that sight-sense is the most important to a reader. Personally speaking, I didn't read a lot of stories in 1954 *Amazing's* because the illos were completely without appeal. I am happy to say that every illo in this ish was attractive. The best was the small Beecham on page 8. You know of any way that I could maybe "lift" it? The Finlay was damn poor for a Finlay, Orban was his usual self, the two other Beechams were all right, and there's nothing to say for the Wilson.

But of course, as usual, the stories remain the meat of any magazine. Jorgensen wastes good writing on paper-thin subject matter. Both Leinster and Lesser were good, but they should have used more wordage, more background development. Bloch's gathering of ideas and facts made a very convincing argument for a "false" world. The theme's been used before, but never quite like this. Tops in the issue for my \$\$\$.

Comes a problem. Now that AS has returned to the action-type, are you going to allow the mag to publish the watery kind of stuff that PS has been using of late? Space opera can be good writing, engaging writing. It has been that; it can be again. What's needed is a story of ideas *and* action.

You might try to get the Smiths—E. E. and G. O. Eshbach told me that he had (or almost had) finished a new novel. Get Paul Pine to track it down, pronto.

Mr. Farble's letter made me do a little thinking. It's nice to see a well-known name on the contents page now and then (this issue there's Leinster), but I'm wondering if those tinted illos were really worth the effort and expense. If they had utilized the color, I would say yes; but all they did was to use a color block. But then, I guess that's the difference between colored and tinted illos. On another tack, good stories don't necessarily have to have Big Name by-lines.

Guy Terwilliger has just about made the definitive statement concerning AS's laxity.

Concerning departments, I hope you'll reinstate the "Observatory" and do a little work yourself. I'm a bit leary of

those upcoming book reviews. I have nothing against Mr. Gerson, but if he does reviews ala the *Times*—I say nix! They've been particularly lifeless. How about something along the lines of Tony Boucher's F&SF? To Roger De Soto, all possibly good luck. We need all the good reviewers we can get.

What the hell happened to the "Reader's Forum"?

Hank Moskowitz
232 Livingston Avenue
New Brunswick, N. J.

● *Okay, Hank: the questions you raise will be answered here, along with some comments by the editor—me. No "watered-down" stuff for us, if we can help it—and I think we can. "Ideas and action" are exactly what we've asked our contributors to furnish. . . . A novel—even one by Eshbach—is simply too long for us to handle in our present format; at least as far as a one-shot is concerned. If Amazing ever goes monthly again, we'll use novels—in serial form. Let enough readers buy the magazine to boom sales 'way up to there—and we will go monthly—and bring you the best damn science-fiction novels written today. . . . The "Observatory" is back in the magazine, pal; like you say, I've gone back to work. . . . Don't think you'll have to worry about Gerson's reviews; he knows his business—and while he may not talk "fannish," he'll let you know what's good reading. . . . Whadaya mean: where the hell's the "Reader's Forum"—you're in it right now!—ED.*

Dear Mr. Browne:

Just finished reading the March issue of AS, and I'd like to put in my gripe.

I started reading *Amazing* from the first issue, about 25 years or more ago. Then about eight or ten imitation magazines (s-f) appeared on the market. My home was so cluttered up with magazines that I decided to donate them to the public library, as soon as I finished reading them.

Now for my gripe. Do you remember the days of trimmed edges? Your readers were always complaining about them. So what did you do? You trimmed the edges, and now you're using them to print the magazine on! I have to use my watchmaker's eye loupe to find your magazine on the stands.

Your stories are still the best. They always were and probably always will be. What there is of them! However, I can read AS in less than two hours, and there was a time when I had to stay up way past midnight because I couldn't lay the magazine down for the next day.

Also, although I never went any higher than the eighth grade, I could always pride myself in knowing as much, or more, scientific theory as my college friends; your articles took care of that.

Your price has tripled since I first started reading AS, but you still claim you can't afford to give us what we want. Well, why don't you go back to pulp and untrimmed edges. I'm sure your other readers would be glad to make the sacrifice in order to get the large size again.

As Robert Bloch says, "I could be wrong." But I don't think so.

Sol Azouz
424 Grand Avenue
Las Vegas, N. M.

● *Look, Sol, we'd like nothing better than to put out issues that run, say, 196 pages or more . . . except that these days the costs of paper, printing, etc., make such books absolutely prohibitive. And like it or not, pulp format simply does not sell! The change was made because they wouldn't sell. All we can do is attempt to make those two hours you mention as enjoyable to you as the four or five you used to spend. And we do not use the trimmed edges to print today's magazines on! Honest, we don't!—ED.*

Dear Sirs:

I always liked the old *Amazing Stories* so well. And the odd part of it is I still like the old big size better.

I need a little help. I have an awful lot of old back issues of lots of different science-fiction magazines. If anybody would like to buy them and will write and enclose a self-addressed and stamped envelope, I'll send them a list. They are all in perfect condition, about four- or five-hundred of them.

Verena Tucking
Route 1, Box 13
Aitkni, Minn.

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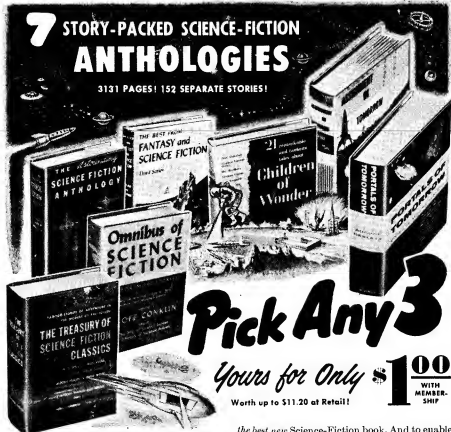
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